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# People BEHIND THE WATER

## Gordon McGhee, Chemist, Clackamas (Ore.) River Water

When Gordon McGhee gets to work at Clackamas River Water (CRW), a domestic water supply district located near Portland, Ore., the first thing he does is check his e-mail. But he's not looking for today's headlines or last night's scores. He's looking for concerns about CRW's water quality.

"We try to contact our customers within a half-hour of learning about a concern," says McGhee, who's been monitoring the water quality since he created the lab at CRW in 1991. "If the complaint merits further investigation, we try to send a technician out within an hour."

When he contacts customers, McGhee asks them to explain to him in detail the nature of the problem, when they first noticed it, and any other information to help him analyze the issue. Most concerns have to do with problems that are temporary, non-health-threatening, and often easy to fix, such as taste and odor concerns or low water pressure. For example, low water pressure could be caused by the use of a fire hydrant on the water system. McGhee works with customers until the problem is corrected to their satisfaction.

In addition to handling customer concerns, McGhee manages routine monitoring of contaminants in the distribution system and watershed. Not only does CRW go beyond the minimum requirements for maintaining water quality, it also monitors the watershed. McGhee works with the Water Board, Watershed Council, and the US Environmental Protection Agency, which is trying to develop a program for volunteer monitoring of watersheds nationwide.

"The amount of testing and monitoring that goes on, not only in the distribution system, but also in the watershed, should make our customers feel safe," McGhee says.



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