

By Craig Winter, CWS-III,  
EnviInvestigations & Remediation

## Boost POE Sales by Leveraging the New Arsenic Standard

In November, President Bush took the opportunity to finalize more than 20 years of debate over the safety of arsenic in drinking water by signing a new standard into law that lowered the allowable level from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb. Most public water systems have until Jan. 22, 2006, to comply, with many smaller systems gaining additional extensions based on cost considerations.

The passage of this new standard immediately changes the compliance status of approximately 25 million people in the United States. This includes 4,100 public water systems serving 13 million Americans and up to 25 percent of the additional 40 million Americans who obtain their drinking water from private wells unregulated by the government.

As the national publicity surrounding arsenic contaminated drinking water filters down to the consumer, a correlation between knowledge on the issue and a preference for a whole house, point-of-entry (POE) treatment approach becomes evident. (The greater the level of knowledge, the greater the preference for POE treatment options.) This preference is fueled largely by concern over adsorption of arsenic through the skin while bathing and the desire to have safe drinking water at all locations in the household.

Recent market research also showed that more than 73 percent of consumers prefer to consult with a water treatment professional when dealing with arsenic. Combining this inclination with the preference for the POE approach, the treatment professional has a unique opportunity to generate significant new revenue from POE sales with minimal upfront effort.

Here are six methods for developing the arsenic treatment market and leveraging the new standard to increase sales from POE treatment systems.

### Educate the Consumer

An initial step in leveraging this new rule is to increase the awareness that arsenic contamination exists locally. Taking an active role in educating your customer based on the issue will provide the greatest rate of return for your arsenic-related marketing dollars.

Although the debate surrounding the new arsenic standard has garnered a significant amount of national attention, most Americans in arsenic-contaminated regions are not aware that their particular community or household may have a problem. They also are not familiar with the severity of the health effects associated with long-term arsenic exposure.



Typical POE arsenic removal system using Aqua-Bind adsorptive media.

In fact, a recent focus group study held in New England found that 95 percent of participants were not aware that arsenic contamination in the region is comparatively high or that the standard recently had been reduced. Once educated on the potential for arsenic in their area and the associated health effects, participant concern increased from an average of 2.4 to 9.5, with 10 being the highest level of concern. A key factor in the attitude change was learning that the standard had been reduced by 80 percent.

Several of the most beneficial methods for creating awareness are as follows.

- **Update your company's website.** With approximately 85 percent of the New England focus group participants noting research on the Internet as an initial step in gathering information, a top priority for dealers interested in growing revenue should be inclusion of local arsenic contamination and treatment options on the company's website.

Remember to keep the consumer's frame of reference in mind when preparing content—keeping it simple and as non-technical as possible. Providing links to other related sites such as [www.waterinfocenter.com](http://www.waterinfocenter.com) also will build trust in your organization and help guide your customer independently toward understanding the benefits of a POE system.

- **Help consumers determine their level of exposure to arsenic.** Clearly determining that arsenic exists in a consumer's drinking water is the next needed step. By offering to perform a free arsenic test for the consumer or providing an in-home "do-it-yourself" arsenic test kit, you can educate your consumer on the actual risk level. This information tool can be extremely beneficial in creating an "act now" attitude in the customer. Helping your customer discover the presence of arsenic and the associated health effects will assist the dealer in closing the deal on-site. Also, educate yourself

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on the local water testing labs and their costs so you can make the process easier for the customers if they want to have an independent validation after the initial in-home test.

- **Educate yourself on the local occurrence of arsenic.** The best way to educate your customers is to be very familiar with the locations and levels that occur in your local area. The state water administrator can provide this information for you. In addition, the U.S. Geological Survey provides detailed maps of many states that can be found on [co.water.usgs.gov/trace/arsenic](http://co.water.usgs.gov/trace/arsenic). The EPA's website for arsenic ([www.epa.gov/safewater/arsenic.html](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/arsenic.html)) and Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791) also can provide additional information.
- **Speaking opportunities.** Take the opportunity to speak publicly about the issue. Schedule someone from your organization to speak at group meetings such as town council gatherings, home owner and builder associations, real estate groups and Lion's Club and Rotary meetings. Concern for children's welfare is the primary motivator for purchasing arsenic treatment, so take advantage of the opportunity to include this group as well by giving a presentation to your children's science class about water quality highlighting the arsenic issue and include water quality awareness lessons in Girl and Boy Scout programs. Children will pass this information along to their mothers who are the initiators in making this type of purchase approximately 75 percent of the time.
- **Develop a one-page fact sheet or brochure.** By outlining the basics of arsenic occurrence, health effects and its treatment options on paper, you multiply the number of people who will learn about the issue. This information can be the same as that on your website and can be sent easily with billings, mailed to existing customers you suspect may have a problem and handed out at public speaking events. Direct mail of educational brochures also can be very effective if sent to those who are known to be in an arsenic-contaminated area.

**Demonstrate Innovative Technology**  
Because the most effective treatment methods for arsenic are rather new technologies, you may want to introduce these to your customers through a demonstration process, offering a free system in exchange for regular monitoring and measuring of operational performance. This tactic not only will introduce the technology to the community but almost always will create enough good will among those who receive the technology that they become an effective part of your sales force. According to the New England focus group research, recommendation from a friend was seen as the second most important influencer in selecting a treatment provider and technology, following closely behind the number one influencer of seeing a positive reference in consumer reports.

In addition to increasing your sales force by generating positive recommendations, this tactic also allows the dealer to become more experienced with new technologies. Traditional treatment methods such as activated alumina and reverse osmosis are not capable of removing arsenic III, the form most threatening to health, most difficult to remove and found almost exclusively in private wells. To remove As III, the dealer will need to become familiar with more cutting-edge technologies that can do the job.

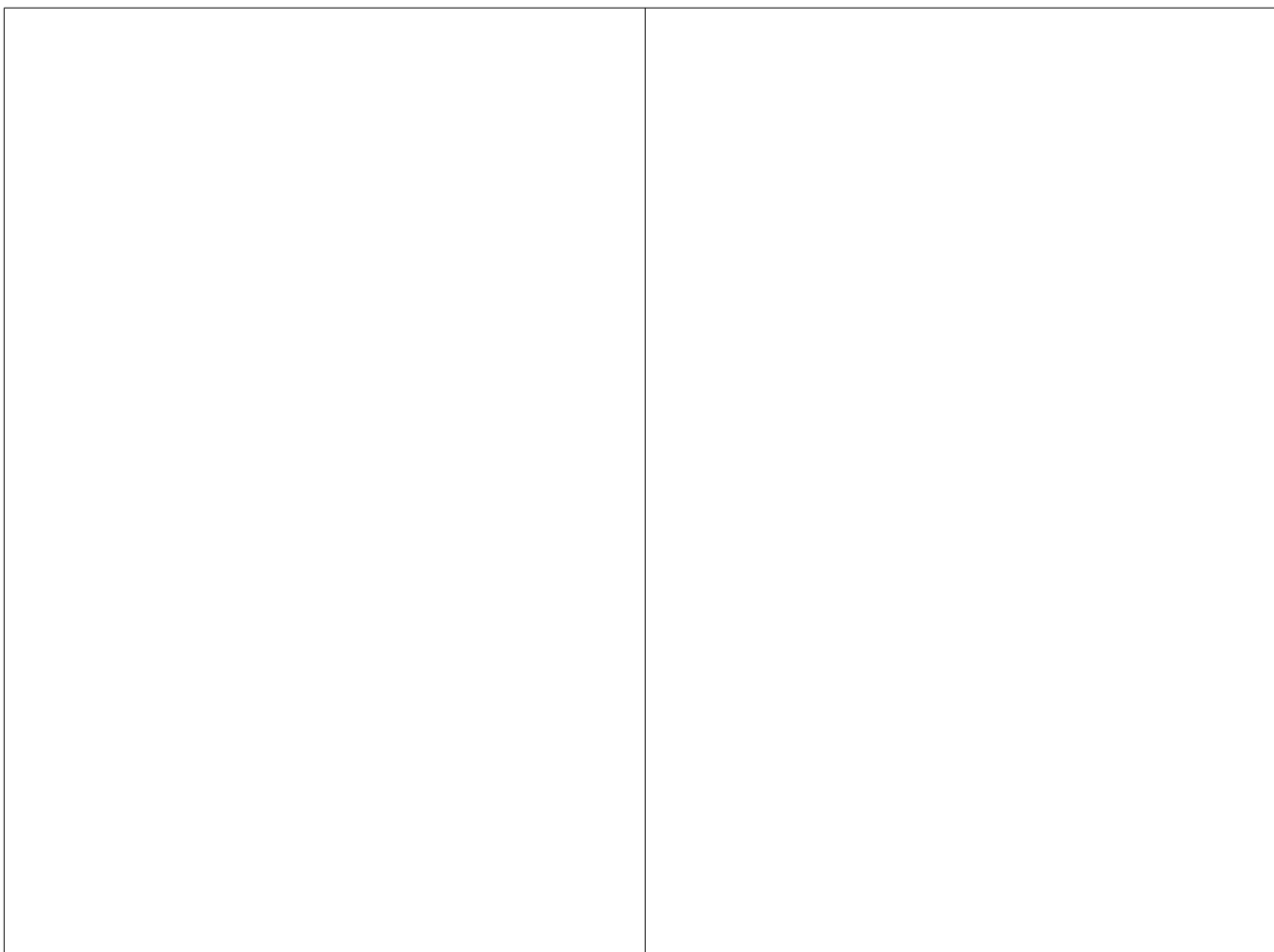
Apyron Technologies' ([www.apyron.com](http://www.apyron.com)) Aqua-Bind™ arsenic removal media is one such technology. The real benefit of this technology is that it removes both forms of arsenic at equal capacities, eliminating the testing needed to speciate the arsenic, as well as any pre-treatment that would be needed to convert the As III to As V.

Another effective suggestion would be to conduct miniature on-site demonstrations of the POE technology. The dealer can test the water prior to running it through treatment media and test again after the filtration exercise to show that the arsenic

had been removed. A small-scale demonstration also will help the consumer understand the treatment concept, making the cost associated with the purchase of a POE system easier to accept.

#### Build Effective Partnerships

Increasingly, water quality is an important issue for homeowners. In the 2001 National Consumer Water Quality Survey, 9 out of 10 Americans expressed concerns regarding the quality of their tap water with 65 percent of respondents indicating that they would pay for in-home treatment to reduce arsenic.



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Due to this concern, home inspectors test the tap water for a number of contaminants prior to the sale of a house. In areas where arsenic contamination is prevalent, home inspectors, laboratories and real estate agents often are in the position of making a recommendation to the seller or buyer for a particular type of arsenic treatment technology.

Consider reaching out to home inspectors, laboratories and realtors in your area to form partnerships. Send a letter outlining arsenic treatment

solutions and the benefits of your POE system to these potential partners so they can better inform their clients of the available options. Offer free testing to the realtor or home inspector. Allowing them to tout the use of a water treatment professional to their customers is a win-win relationship where they gain the trust of their client and you're sure to get the reference if arsenic is present. Also, act as a sounding board for questions and provide thoughtful and honest answers to all questions.

**Get Your Technology Systems Preapproved By Bankers**  
Although new POE technologies are cost-effective when compared to other solutions on the market, an average installation cost still can be as much as \$2,000 to \$4,000.

Ease the customer's financing process by educating local loan officers, mortgage lenders and finance companies on the effectiveness of the technology. By getting your organization's technology preapproved by the bankers, a point of resistance is removed from the

decision-making process, increasing your odds for closing the sale and making the purchase a more pleasant experience.

**Be an Industry Innovator**  
Avoid pushing the same filtration system as a solution to every water problem. Arsenic contamination is a specific problem, and successful treatment can be accomplished with a targeted and more cost-efficient system. Many treatment systems do not work well for arsenic, especially arsenic III, so take the opportunity to explore new technologies designed specifically for arsenic removal.

Also, be a leader in your area on the arsenic issue. Learn all that you can about arsenic contamination and advocate that residents have their water tested. By being the local expert on the issue, you'll soon earn a reputation as the local consumer advocate, gaining trust and credibility.

**Act as a Trusted Resource ... And Mean It**  
Consumers want to rely on a professional they can trust, not one who will do anything to make the highest profit. Present every potential customer with each appropriate option for POE arsenic treatment in the home. Make your recommendations based on their water profile and their budget, not on which product sale will put the most money in your pocket. Chances are, they will appreciate your honesty and will purchase from you again as well as promote your services to others, leading you to new customers.

In addition, show concern over existing customers' water quality—offer to test their drinking water for arsenic, free of charge while in their homes. If the level of arsenic is high, explain that a POE system would protect their entire home from arsenic contamination. Remember that the more information about arsenic a consumer has, the more interest it generates in a POE approach. By providing your customers with a wealth of credible information, backed by facts and experience, you will build trust and pave the way for increased POE sales. **WQP**

**About the Author**

Craig Winter, CWS-III, is president of EnviroInvestigations & Remediation, Inc., which operates a water treatment sales and service division called Advanced Quality Water Solutions (AQWS) ([www.aqws.com](http://www.aqws.com)). The company is headquartered in Brunswick, Maine, with additional offices in central and northern Maine. AQWS has been working to combat arsenic contamination in drinking water since 1999. Craig has more than 12 years experience working with contaminated groundwater issues and can be reached at 207-721-8620; [cwinter@suscom-maine.net](mailto:cwinter@suscom-maine.net).

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