

# Hands washed of compo claims

by Geoff Chambers  
council reporter

**COUNCIL** workers and contractors were refused compensation after drinking contaminated recycled water at the controversial \$80 million Pimpama Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Workers, who also showered at the plant, were exposed to the dirty recycled water for nine weeks and were at high risk of contracting hepatitis A and giardia.

In the second incident of water contamination on the Gold Coast in a week, a total of 375 workers, contractors and visitors to the plant were exposed to the Class D recycled water, which is the worst recorded water quality.

Documents leaked to *The Bulletin* reveal workers were exposed to the recycled water from September 3 to November 11 in 2008.

During the same period, senior Gold Coast City Council officers accepted an award in Vienna, championing the wastewater plant.

According to Queensland Health and the Health Services Australia, out of the 341 workers interviewed, a minimum of 73 people became sick from the water.

Both reports were confidentially released in March and showed 'no similar events in Australia recorded in published literature'.

Class B recycled water is used for some agricultural uses (pasture irrigation), Class C is for open space irrigation (public access restricted) and Class D is used on non-food crop irrigation.

The water mix-up was a dangerous precursor to last week's cross-connection contamination, which pumped diluted Class A+ recycled water in to 630 Coomera homes.

After deflecting blame for the past week, *The Bulletin* can today reveal that coun-

cillors will be told by CEO Dale Dickson that a plumbing contractor would be prosecuted for the incorrect pipe connection.

Gold Coast Water inspectors are required by law to monitor all work completed by contractors, which would leave the council liable in any future legal action.

The 2008 incident, which Mayor Ron Clarke previously blamed on an apprentice mixing wastewater lines directly into the plant, has revealed serious concerns about water connections at the plant.

The Queensland Health report states the Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services conducted water quality tests from November to December.

During that period, the water quality varied between Class B and Class D.

A reference group created by Queensland Health and Gold Coast Water contracted an occupational health consultant to handle the crisis situation and liaise with GPs.

The Queensland Health report says incorrect Gold Coast Water testing was due to 'reported system failures'.

The HSA report says the supplied water was exposed to council employees, sub contractors, Pimpama Coomera Waterfuture Alliance employees, Water-cycle Alliance employees and other visitors, which may include councillors.

*The Bulletin* has learnt that workers were refused compensation requests last month, including one who continues to suffer from the water contamination.

The plant which will service the Coomera-Pimpama corridor, took more than three years to build and experienced several cost blow-outs.



Pimpama Treatment Plant workers drank contaminated water for weeks

## Hepatitis fears after showers

**OUTDOOR** workers at the Pimpama Wastewater Treatment Plant showered, washed their clothes and drank from a heavily contaminated water source.

Sources have told *The Bulletin* that workers were 'embarrassed' after using the water, which ranged in quality from Class B to Class D recycled water, for a nine-week period.

In the weeks following the contamination, workers feared they may have contracted hepatitis A after suffering severe gastrointestinal infections.

Council CEO Dale Dickson said the incident was unfortunate.

Legal action has been launched by the State Government against four individuals and the contractor.

"While the problem was quickly rectified, Gold Coast Water's priority was the health and welfare of staff,

contractors and visitors to that building," said Mr Dickson.

"Staff have had regular briefings, reimbursement of medical expenses and counselling services.

"We also appointed an occupational health and safety specialist physician so affected staff could be provided with accurate and relevant information."

After the contamination incident, experts moved quickly to conduct more than 2500 tests, which located 315 chemicals.

The water contained pathogens including salmonella, cryptosporidium, giardia, coliphages, enterohaemorrhagic *E. coli* genes and clostridium perfringens.

The Queensland Health report said 'the samples did not meet ADWG (Australian drinking water guidelines) values and presented a plausible risk of illness associated with exposure'.