

Papers of Mayor James Rolph

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COPY CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
CENTRAL OFFICE
1085 MISSION STREET

October 30, 1918.

Hon. James Rolph, Jr.,
and the Honorable Board of Supervisors
of the City and County of San Francisco:

Gentlemen:

In light of the controversy that has arisen over the advisability or inadvisability of using salt water, through the medium of the high pressure mains, to flush the streets and sewers of San Francisco during the present epidemic of influenza, it gives the undersigned pleasure to comply with your request that we set forth our opinion, already given you orally on numerous occasions, in the matter at issue.

The flushing of the streets and sewers will have no direct effect in lessening the influenza epidemic, for the reason that the germs of the disease are transmitted directly from person to person through droplets from the nose and mouth of the one afflicted, and because the radius of infection does not extend beyond the expectorating line.

At all times the Board of Public Works keeps the sewers of this city in an eminently satisfactory condition, from a sanitary viewpoint. The flushing of the streets and sewers being carried on is a thorough cleansing. Its value lies in the fact that surplus dust and dirt are removed, thus lessening the possibility of an irritation of the mucous membranes of the nose and ~~throat~~ throat.

In this work, fresh water is quite as satisfactory, from the standpoint of sanitation, as salt water. Attention might be called to the fact that influenza has been raging among the crews of ships at sea, where salt water entirely surrounds them and where it is used constantly in the washing down of decks. In a word, it is our professional opinion that the value of salt water over fresh water in fighting the epidemic of influenza is nil.

It is well known that the flushing of San Francisco's streets and sewers with salt water from the high pressure mains would entail the expenditure of a large sum of money. We earnestly advise against such an expenditure, on the ground that it is not justified and the money could be used to much greater advantage in providing relief for the sick and needy.

Respectfully yours,
(SGD) ARTHUR H. BARENDT, President of the
Board of Health, City and County of San
Francisco.

(SGD) WILLIAM C. HASSLER,
Health Officer, City and
County of San Francisco.