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Whole Home Hydration Without Minerals:

The Sylvan Source M-600 Water Treatment System

At the other extreme of the consumer water spectrum is Sunnyvale, CA-based Sylvan Source whose initial product and marketing strategy are equally “pure”. In contrast to the beverages mentioned above that add minerals back to water, Sylvan Source has R&Ded a multi-process whole home water appliance that it claims removes more minerals and compounds from water than other home treatment system.

Sylvan Source CEO Laura Demmons, a former HP executive, stresses that less than five percent of minerals used by our bodies are from drinking water, and that these are mostly inorganic, and less likely to be assimilated into the body.

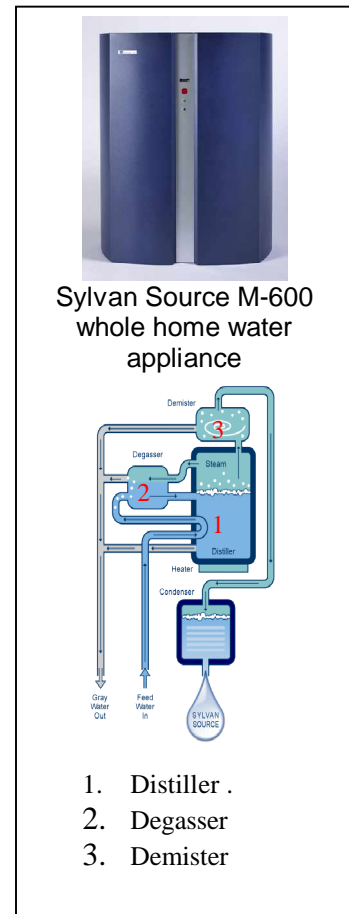
Seeking to establish a high tech position, executive talent includes a chief technology officer formerly with SRI International, and a marketing director from Sun Microsystems. Funding for the company’s first product, the M-600, is from angel investors and bridge financing.

Designed to install and work like a “true appliance” for whole house water treatment, the M-600 costs \$3400 - \$3800 per system, including 3 years on parts and labor. Installation of the wall unit can be in a utility room, closet, or garage, and then plumbed to multiple faucets throughout the home and to the refrigerator. The M-600 produces 6 gallons of ultra-clean water per day and has a 7-gallon stainless steel holding tank.

Claiming to have gone beyond the traditional distillation process of normal home units, Sylvan Source has engineered a three-stage process that integrates (1) distillation, (2) degassing and (3) demisting technologies. These eliminate volatile gases and liquids and significantly reduce contaminants in mist droplets from steam created during the distillation phase, while allowing ultra clean steam to pass.

Unit Certification

Importantly, in addition to having received NSF/ANSI Standard 62 compliance certification, the M-600 appliance has been certified by the California Department of Health Services’



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Water Treatment Device Certification Unit and Massachusetts Board of State Examiners of Plumbers and Gas Fitters for installation by state-licensed plumbers.

Both are key agencies requiring companies to meet additional protocols. Certification has also come from the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) and Underwriter's Laboratories (UL).

Additional degasser tests and proxies for VOCs are being conducted at Menlow Park, CA-SRI International.

While a key talking point for distributors is the greater contaminant reduction, no maintenance, no chemicals, filters, cartridges, or membranes; the M-600 offers only a slight advantage over RO based on 3 gallons per day for a family of five with its claim of "better than 2:1 ratio of clean water to waste water", or one gallon of "clean water" for every half gallon of "waste water". Operating (electric costs) are about \$0.46 per gallon.

Marketing "No Minerals": The Long Road

Sylvan Source is targeting upscale appliance distributors who sell big-ticket, name-brand home appliances. A key selling feature for distributors is a patent pending, proprietary self-cleaning technology that ensures no maintenance is required under normal operating and water conditions.

Distribution includes Purcell Murray Company, a leading independent distributor of premier kitchen appliances in California, Nevada, and Arizona. Sylvan Source dealer Randy Korte, division VP at Factory Direct Appliance, Inc. of Kansas City, KN, called the output, "the best water I have ever tasted." This includes water from several different RO systems, he said. "Water tastes different from almost ever source and every area of the globe and the Sylvan water has a fresh and pure taste."

Even so, a major obstacle for the company includes countering competitor's marketing messages about the importance of minerals in home water and overcoming the "flat" taste of demineralized water. As noted several bottled water brands emphasize adding minerals back into their product to produce a refreshing taste. (See "Cloud Water Better Than Spring Water?", p. 14.)

In short, Demmons thinks consumers should follow the lead of nutritionists and the American Medical Association who say that food is a more important source of minerals than water.