Fouling Issues of Nano Filtration Membrane Skid #2

Alfonso Javier Lopez Perozo
Dr. Hector J. Cruzado
Graduate School

Abstract

Water treatment plants that use nano filtration membranes are affected by fouling issues when the feedwater is not controlled efficiently. The city of Hallandale Beach experienced a reduction in filtration capacity and increased process pressure on Skid #2. This research used Lean Six Sigma principles that helped identify the root causes and countermeasures to mitigate or eliminate them. The DMAIC methodology was developed using its five steps: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control. The data gathered by supervisory control and data acquisition software allowed the use of statistical tools and techniques to identify events of high flow and high pressure in the process, which were analyzed to confirm that the skid does not have an effective way to control the pressure/flow, chemical dosing issues, and pressure protection failures. The proposed countermeasures fixed the pressure protection system, recommended the installation of an influent modulating valve and a new chemical dosing system.

Introduction

The City of Hallandale Beach (COHB) is the 76th largest city out of 282 in Florida. It was incorporated in 1927. It has 41,217 residents over 4.4 square miles with 81 miles of water transmission and distribution lines. COHB produces approximately 7 million gallons of water per day with two different treatment process; one process, uses two nano filtration skids of 3-million-gallon capacity per each.

The skids have a total of 497 membranes elements. The Skid #2 was showing issues with pressures and performance. Membrane fouling issues are costly for the COHB Water Treatment Plant because they resulted in expenses associated with membrane replacement costs and decreased water quality. Identifying, correcting, or mitigating the variables that cause the fouling issues will allow the COHB to maintain potable water production, meet/exceed the quality standards, optimize the control process, and maintain/increase the useful life of the system.

Background

Water filtration systems processes such as Nano-Filtration (NF) membranes and Reverse Osmosis (RO) membranes are used more commonly to produce potable water from different raw water sources, such as rivers, groundwater aquifers, seawater, reclaimed water, and others. These processes use the membrane as physical separation (porous media) to remove the contaminates from the raw water, contrasting each other on the size of the particles or elements that each can remove. The NF membrane can remove particles between 0.01 to 0.001 micrometers in diameter, and the RO membrane can remove particles between 0.001 to 0.0001 micrometers in diameter [1].

These water filtration processes require specific pressure values to pass the water through the membrane; the pressure will increase in proportion to the pore size reduction (porous media). Raw water contains different contaminants depending on where it comes from; these contaminants can be natural organic matter, inorganic matter, pollutants, and toxic compounds [2]. The membrane can be affected by the accumulation of contaminants on the porous or membrane surface, creating a membrane fouling with reduced water production and increased power consumption (an increase in pressure) [3].

The water filtration processes with membranes use fouling mitigation and control techniques to reduce the accumulation of contaminants, and the fouling type and estimated frequency specify the application. Some of the methods used to control the fouling issues are feedwater pretreatment which can be chemical, by using in-line coagulation-flocculation, UV radiation, floatation, scale inhibition, etc., and using other physical media filtration, such as cartridge filters, coarse strainer, sand separators, and other [4].

Problem

The objectives of this project were to:

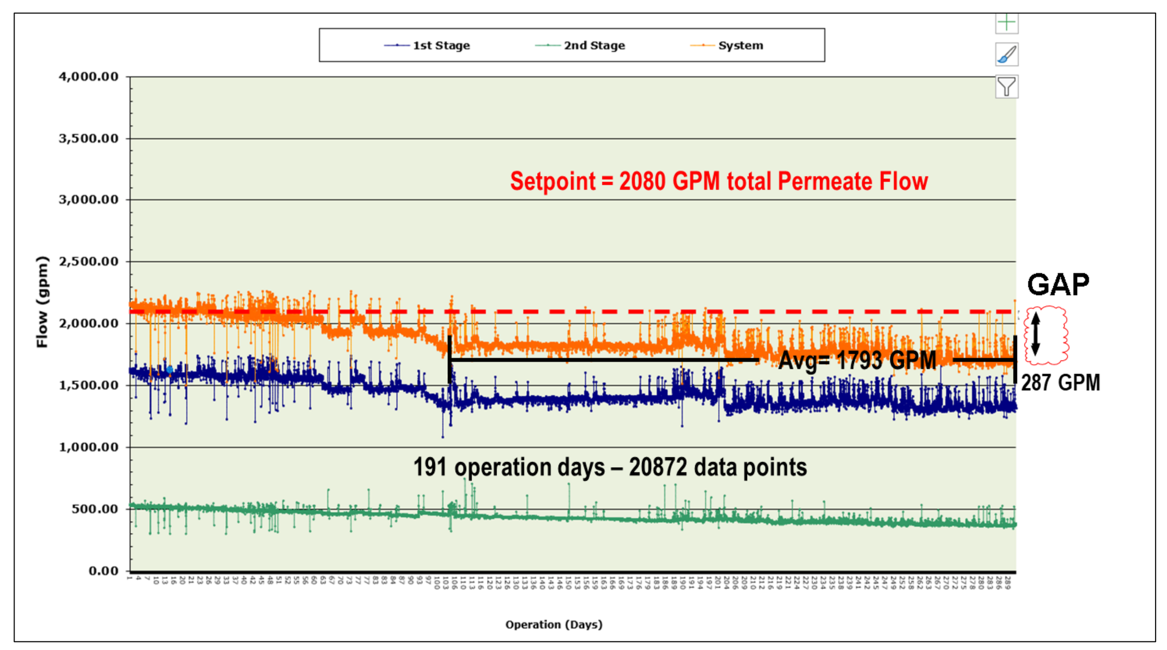
- Propose the best alternative to control the feed water for the Nano Filtration skid system.
- Propose a reliable chemical dosing for the Nano Filtration Feed Water.
- Validate the pressure protection system conditions.

Methodology

This research was conducted using the DMAIC methodology of Lean Six Sigma; this allowed to follow a logical sequence to identify the issues that cause the fouling issues. The DMAIC process involves five steps: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control.

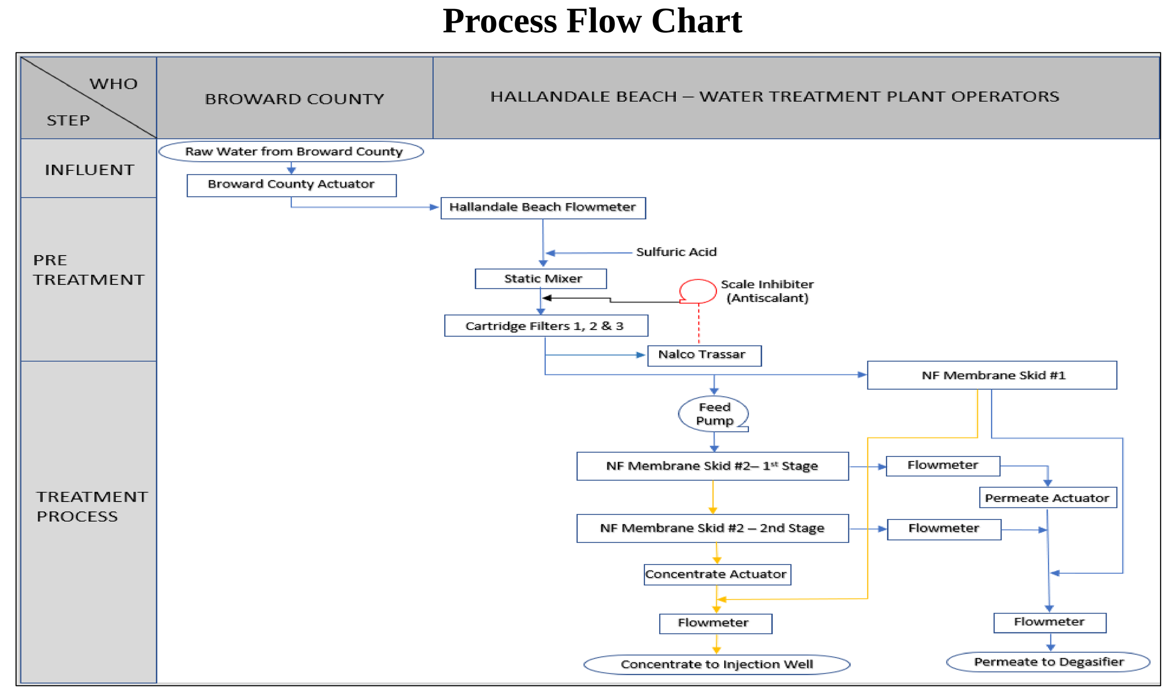
Define

Display Indicator performance



As shown in the Display Indicator Performance figure, the permeate flows decreased from the established setpoint of 2080 gallons per minute (gpm) until an average of 1973 gallons per minute (gpm).

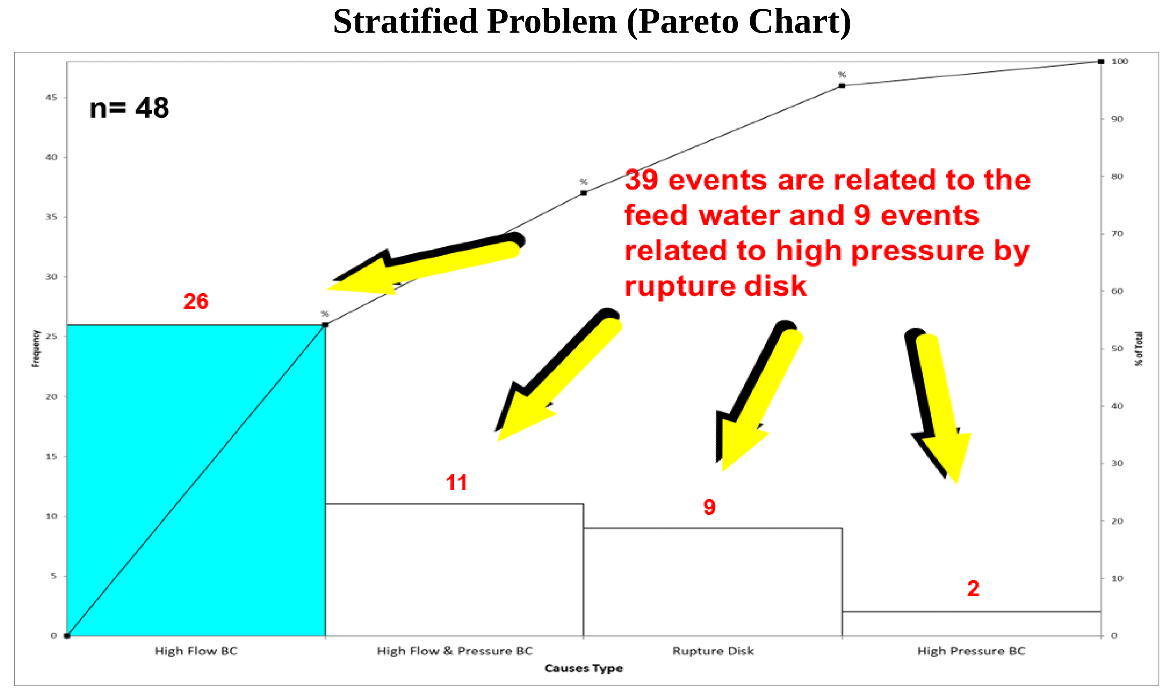
Process Flow Chart



The Process Flow Chart describes the different components and elements that are part of the process, who are responsible for each operation, and the overall phases in the treatment (influent, pre-treatment, water treatment).

Measure

Stratified Problem (Pareto Chart)



The Pareto Chart shows the frequency of events per group, confirming that 39 events were caused by the feed water fluctuations. The remaining 9 events were caused by a pressure backup from the degasifiers. Based on these findings, the problem statement was defined as "Permeate water overproduction, and high pressures can create scaling when particles accumulate on a membrane, causing the membrane's pores to plug."

Analyze

Single Case Bore Analysis

Reasons (that contributed to the above problem Statement)	8-3-2020	8-5-2020	9-30-2020	9-30-2020	11-1-2020	11-19-2020	11-14-2020	12-7-2020	12-12-2020	2-1-2021	2-5-2021	2-8-2021	2-9-2021	2-11-2021	2-11-2021	2-11-2021	2-14-2021	2-14-2021	2-17-2021	2-18-2021	2-19-2021	3-3-2021	3-16-2021	4-15-2021
1) High Flow from Broward County 1	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X			X	X	X			X	X			X	
2) High Flow and Pressure from Broward County 3										X		X					X	X			X			X
3) Rupture Disk 4													X									X		
4) High Pressure Broward County 5						X			X															
5) Antiscalant Under Dosing (estimated) 2	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X			X	X	X			X	X			X	

Reasons (that contributed to the above problem Statement)	4-15-2021	4-16-2021	4-25-2021	5-5-2021	5-5-2021	5-5-2021	5-10-2021	5-11-2021	5-16-2021	5-17-2021	5-22-2021	6-3-2021	6-4-2021	8-16-2021	9-6-2021	9-9-2021	12-7-2021	12-9-2021	12-16-2021	12-16-2021	12-29-2021	1-11-2022	1-12-2022	1-27-2022	Total	%
1) High Flow from Broward County 1		X		X	X	X					X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X					26	35%
2) High Flow and Pressure from Broward County 3	X						X	X		X												X			11	15%
3) Rupture Disk 4			X						X					X		X					X		X	X	9	12%
4) High Pressure Broward County 5																									2	3%
5) Antiscalant Under Dosing (estimated) 2		X		X	X	X					X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X					26	35%

The single case bore analysis used the four groups of data obtained in the measure step. The SMEs added an additional reason: "Antiscalant under-dosing," considering that a sudden increase in feed water flow can cause the antiscalant injection system to under-dose. The reasons were validated per period, adding the frequencies for each one, and then dividing them by the total of occurrences to obtain a percentage of occurrences.

Root Verification Matrix

Potential Root Cause		How Verified?	Estimated Impact On Gap (H,M,L)	Root Cause or Symptom
A	No effective way to regulate the flow and pressure coming to the NF skid system	The root cause was discussed with SMEs, and after reviewing documentation and data, it was concluded that NF Membrane Skids do not have protection to prevent or regulate high flow and pressure entering the system	53%	Root Cause
B	No feedback from the analyzer to adjust the dosing pump, analyzer miscalibration, antiscalant chemical underperforming	The root cause was discussed with SMEs, and after reviewing documentation and data, it was concluded that the antiscalant system needed to be evaluated and updated to provide an optimized system response to changes in the process	35%	Root Cause
C	Backup pressure protections failure, feed power failure on RIO 2.1, and PLC sequence failure	The root cause was discussed with SMEs, and after reviewing documentation and data, it was concluded that the City needs to verify and update the pressure protection devices, the power reliability and the PLC sequence.	12%	Root Cause

The identified potential root causes were included in the root causes verification matrix. The estimated impact on the gap was obtained by adding the prevalent reason results from the single case bore analysis.

Improve

Countermeasures Matrix

5=Extreme; 4=High; 3=Moderate; 2=Somewhat; 1=Little

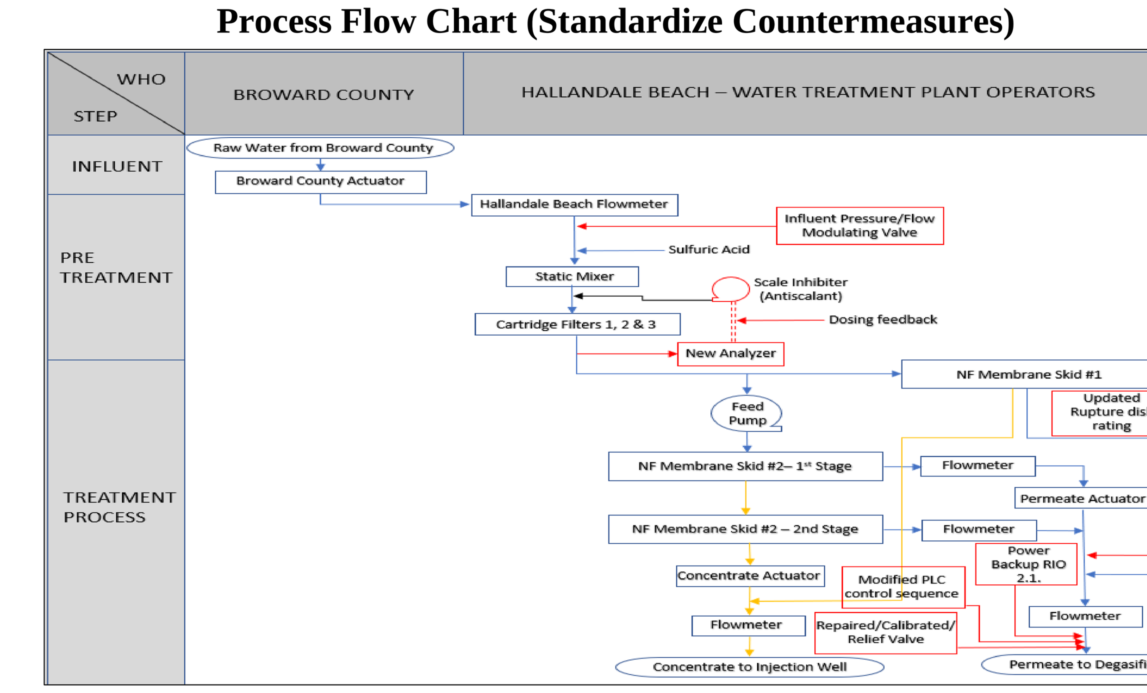
Problem Statement	Verified Root Causes	Countermeasures	Effective-ness	Feasibility	Overall	Take Action? Yes/No
Permeate water overproduction, and high pressures can create scaling when particles accumulate on a membrane, causing membrane's pores to plug."	A-No effective way to regulate the flow and pressure coming to the NF skid system	A1- Installation of an influent pressure/flow modulating valve for the source water from Broward County.	5	4	20	Y
	B-No feedback from the analyzer to adjust the dosing pump, analyzer miscalibration, antiscalant chemical underperforming	B2- Update the antiscalant analyzer and update the designed control system.	5	4	20	Y
	C-Backup pressure protections failure, feed power failure on RIO 2.1, and PLC sequence failure	C1- Repair/replace/recalibrate the relief valve at the degasifier.	4	4	16	Y
		C2- Evaluate reducing the pressure rating of the rupture disk.	4	5	20	Y
		C3- Modify the PLC control sequence of the actuators.	4	5	20	Y
		C4- Update the power backup of the RIO 2.1.	4	5	20	Y

The countermeasures matrix helped the SMEs to link the relationship between the problem, the root causes, and the countermeasures to evaluate which countermeasures should be implemented. The action plan developed for countermeasures implementation is described as follows:

- "A1" A project will be developed to include the design, procurement, and implementation phases of influent modulating valve. Estimated time for project completion is 12 months.
- "B1" Install a new antiscalant analyzer, and flowmeter to measure the chemical injection, and control the dosing pump. The new equipment's were ordered (6 months of lead time)
- "C1" Completed on February 3rd, 2023. The manufacturer tested the valve, adjusted the settings, and completed the calibration.
- "C2" Reduction of the rupture disk rating from 85 psi to 50 psi. The lead time for the new rupture disk from the manufacturer was two months (April 2023).
- "C3" Completed on February 6th, 2023. The (PLC) sequence was updated, and the failure mode configuration on the actuators was changed from fail-to-closed to fail-to-open action.
- "C4" Completed on February 2nd, 2023; the existing uninterrupted power system (UPS) was replaced and updated from 750 VA to a new unit with 1500 VA per the city electrical engineer's recommendation.

Control

Process Flow Chart (Standardize Countermeasures)



The countermeasures were integrated into the process flowchart, with the exact location of each one in the process.

Conclusions

This research focused on finding the root causes of the Nano Filtration Skid #2 fouling issues using the DMAIC methodology of Lean Six Sigma. The corrective actions applied to the pressure relief valve, the power backup RIO 2.1, and the PLC control sequence eliminate the root cause of a backup pressure affecting the membranes. This research helped to confirm the importance of controlling the feed water flow and pressure, their relationship with the antiscalant dosing system, and the impact of downstream degasifier process failures on the nano filtration Skid #2.

Due to the required design, procurement, testing, and evaluation, the countermeasures pending for implementation in this research will require further analysis in operation. The influent pressure/flow modulating valve shall be incorporated using a new PLC control sequence to allow the operational parameters to change when the two nano filtration skids are running simultaneously versus the regular operation of one. The new antiscalant analyzer, the flow meter, and the dosing pump shall be included in the PLC control sequence to adjust the injection accurately with the changes in flow.

Future Work

Feedwater is usually pretreated before its processing in a membrane-based unit to minimize the chances of fouling. Varying pretreatment schemes can be designed based on the feedwater's properties and chemical composition. These schemes are generally classified into conventional and nonconventional methods; for this study, the focus was applied to physical mitigation characteristics like flow, pressure, and chemical mitigation using antiscalant. Other feedwater pretreatment schemes as pH adjustment, temperature control, sand separator, acid dosing, etc., can be developed and included in future research to increase the scope of process control strategy and reduce the probability of fouling issues.

References

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