

From the CTAWWA Chair



Hi folks! 2009 is behind us now and it has been a very challenging year. Water sales have been below target all year, and they continue to plummet even in the traditionally lower production months. We've all had to cut back operating expenses to offset the loss in revenue. Our colleagues in state and local government are feeling the pinch of the economic downturn with staff furloughs and deep cuts in expense

budgets. People are out of work and in some cases out of their homes. Many of our customers are having trouble paying their bills.

Change is clearly afoot in the landscape of the public drinking water supply business, on many fronts. How much of it is permanent? How much of it is temporary? There is a lot of uncertainty about the future. One thing our customers are not worrying about is whether the water will flow when they open their taps and whether it will be safe to consume. To a large extent this is because our industry has been able to attract very talented people and because a lot of those people are active members of the CT Section of AWWA, and/or CWWA. Our industry organizations provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas that result in effective action on the key issues that face our industry year after year. This work is invaluable to our member companies.

Within our industry organizations, the committees are where most of the real work gets done. On our website (www.ctawwa.org) you will see that the Section has 24 committees listed. You will also see that our strategic plan has four key focus areas, all of which rely heavily on various Committees to move the business of the Section forward. One of the goal areas is partnerships.

I want to share a success story with you highlighting the work of our Cross Connection Committee and demonstrating that all the time and effort we put in to committee work does pay off. It also demonstrates that partnerships, including teamwork between our utilities, our industry organizations and building relationships with our state and local agencies are critically important ingredients in these successes. This is just one of many committee success stories that deserves our attention and appreciation.

Recently, a letter from the State Building Inspector, Lisa Humble, came across my desk. The letter notifies all Municipal Building Officials that, as the result of recent legislation, they have new duties and responsibilities regarding the interface between public water supply systems and work on buildings that use the public water supply.

Specifically, the new responsibilities require the local building inspector to notify the water company within seven days of receipt of an application where the change in use of water within the building or the addition of new fixtures could result in potential cross connection contamination risk to the public water supply. Water companies are then responsible to inspect the facility and determine whether backflow prevention devices are necessary in order to protect the public water supply.

The local building inspector is further directed not to issue a certificate of occupancy until the water company is satisfied that all cross connection issues have been resolved. There is further provision in the statute that the local Director of Health may issue an order to the water company to shut off service to a premises where they have determined that an unacceptable risk to the public supply exists.

These notification and CO withholding provisions for local Building Inspectors paired with the empowerment of the local Health Director to assist in obtaining compliance provide a great opportunity for public water suppliers to reduce the risk of cross connection contamination of drinking water, especially from residential properties with lawn irrigation systems and fire suppression systems.

This tremendous step forward in drinking water quality protection all came about due to the diligence, hard work and persistence of our Cross Connection Committee in partnership with CWWA's Legislative Committee. The Cross Connection Committee identified the issue and determined that it required a legislative solution. They brought it to the Legislative Committee, who put it on their legislative agenda, worked the issue through the State Legislative process with great skill and got a law passed. It's been a long time coming, but it was definitely worth the time and effort.

The ball is now back in our court. It is up to us to establish effective working relationships with the local Building Inspectors. A letter from the water company providing the contact information for their cross connection control staff will let the local Building Inspectors know that we're interested and will also facilitate receipt of the application notifications. Following up promptly with inspections on the indicated facilities will also be important. Based on past experience, I'm sure that these activities will also provide new opportunities to build relationships with the local Directors of Health.

So, many thanks to the members of the CT Section AWWA Cross Connection Committee, to the members of CWWA's Legislative Committee and to all the members of all the committees who continue to make our organization and our industry look good, and inspire our customers' confidence in the public drinking water supply industry in Connecticut.

Let's not forget that one of the reasons that our committee members are so well positioned to make valuable contributions like these is due to the major emphasis that the Section places on education (another key goal area). The terrific array of education classes offered every year, combined with the cutting edge information and access to our vendors that is provided at our ATCAVE conference are top notch.

If any of you reading this are not yet members of the CTAWWA, I hope that you will consider membership in our terrific organization. Come join in the fun (a.k.a. "work") and seize the opportunity to become a part of the many ongoing success stories that membership provides access to.

Sincerely,
John J. Herlihy,
Aquarion Water Company
CTAWWA Chair, 2009-2010