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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WATER & WASTES DIGEST is published exclusively for the 90,000+ decision makers in the municipal and industrial water, wastewater and water pollution industries. These individuals actively design, specify, buy, operate and maintain the equipment, chemicals and services used for water treatment. Editorial content in this audited publication highlights new products and literature concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. Regular Product Emphasis and High-Tech Focus sections feature major equipment and systems. A product directory is included in the annual June *Buyer's Guide*.

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WATER & WASTES DIGEST

No Small Challenge

It is no breaking news to water professionals that water in the U.S. costs less than it should. This is a sore subject, especially when utilities and plants are faced with a need for a system upgrade or have to tend to a crumbling infrastructure. These issues, however, become even more challenging for rural and small systems.

If we take a look at needs per household, they will be far greater for small systems. In addition to various other factors, this is mainly due to the fact that they simply have fewer community members who can absorb any additional costs. The cost for a treatment plant renovation is much easier when it is distributed among a community of 100,000-plus, for example, in comparison to a community with a population of less than 3,000.

So the question is, "How do small systems meet pressing regulatory requirements and achieve sustainability of their water infrastructure and water resources?"

Water systems, regardless of size, should determine what revenue they would need to operate their plant and plan ahead for future investment needs. Furthermore, rate changes for customers should reflect the full costs of service. In this way, even though rates increase over time as necessary investments are made, the impact of a single project is lessened.

However, as I mentioned earlier, this can result in a significant rate adjustment to some customers in rural communities with low incomes who simply could not afford to pay.

Because medium and small water systems may face challenges in getting sufficient revenue to cover large capital projects, EPA suggests that some of these water systems turn to funding programs that are available to help them at the federal and state levels.

For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has the Rural Development Water and Wastewater Grant/Loan program that is focused on assisting systems serving less than 10,000.

EPA has also made grants available to states to capitalize Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs. These SRF programs provide low-interest loans to utilities for eligible infrastructure projects. In the case of drinking water, some disadvantaged assistance is available to provide further subsidy to communities in need.

While costs remain a top concern for small systems, so does the lack of qualified engineers that are interested in moving to remote locations.

We may not have the same problems of poverty-stricken villages around the world that have no roads or bridges to reach them and are without clean water; but with more than 94% of the nation's public water systems serving fewer than 3,300 persons, funding and lack of staffing are no small challenge.



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