

# Flunking Infrastructure

The 2009 Report Card for America's Infrastructure is out, and the grades are concerning. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the nation's infrastructure average grade is a miserable D. Both drinking water and wastewater systems scored even lower: D-. This report clearly identifies the lack of funding in maintaining and upgrading aging and outdated infrastructure.



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Unfortunately, this is not breaking news. Study after study identifies the need to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in water and wastewater infrastructure over the next two decades. According to the ASCE report, despite spending billions on infrastructure each year, drinking water systems in the U.S. face an annual shortfall of at least \$11 billion. It is estimated that because of rapidly deteriorating pipes, about 7 billion gal of clean drinking water are lost each day. Wastewater systems are also in a dire state, polluting surface water and no longer meeting increasing population demand.

Utilities are trying to carefully evaluate the full cost of providing a safe supply of drinking water to their customers and determine how to set water rates

that reflect those costs. Despite this fact, both drinking water and wastewater utilities report that they are currently unable to generate enough revenue from user rates and other local sources to cover the cost of their services. This is especially true for small communities, which makes up the majority (83%) of drinking water systems in the U.S.

At this point, improving the nation's infrastructure will require aggressive federal funding. While history shows that infrastructure is particularly important in maintaining economic growth, levels of public investment have been falling since the 1970s, and federal assistance has not increased. In fact, the U.S. invests just over 2% of its GDP in infrastructure in comparison to Europe's 5% and China's 9%, according to ASCE.

These numbers clearly show the lack of financial commitment in infrastructure over the last several decades.

There is no doubt plenty of challenges exist ahead. The question is, how do we address them? Perhaps it is time to stop pondering the lack of infrastructure spending and take action. Not only do we need to determine who is going to pay, but also how much we are willing to pay to ensure that we overcome water shortages and future generations will continue to have access to safe drinking water. We know that the technology is available; now it is time to make this a priority.

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### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*Water & Wastes Digest* is published exclusively for the 85,000+ 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 technologies concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. A product directory is included in the annual June Buyer's Guide.

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