EDITORIAL *letter*

Drop by Drop

There are always at least two sides to every story, and this is especially true when it comes to water metering.

Many water conservation activists believe that implementing effective water metering on a residential level can increase citizens' water consumption awareness and prompt more conscientious use. On the flip side, however, there is concern that metering's potential to heighten water rates can have a negative impact on low-income customers.

Both arguments make a valid point, but the real issue here is that either way, water utilities must find a way to address their resource management and distribution challenges and determine customers' consumption behavior and water usage patterns. Effective metering can help utilities achieve these goals.

The price of water varies widely between cities and rural areas, and especially between economic sectors. What is charged, though, is a small fraction of what it actually costs to extract water and deliver it to users. Because of this disparity, many water systems are unable to cover their costs using revenue from water rates alone.

Implementation of advanced metering systems in water utilities can result in operational efficiencies and distribution reliability. The systems also provide access to timely and detailed usage information.

Over the last few years, advances in metering technology have allowed utilities access to real-time monitoring of water loss that might otherwise lead to a high-bill issue. For example, new metering technology can monitor and trigger an alert for in-home leaks—leaky toilets and faucets, for instance. The alerts allow utilities to issue a prompt leak notification, which results not only in proactive customer service but also water loss reduction.

Water conservation and leak prevention measures, however, do not start and stop with end-users. Because of aging infrastructure, utilities struggle with water loss every minute of the day; but surprisingly, unpredictable water main breaks that result in hundreds of gallons of water loss are not the biggest water wasters. According to utility managers, a service line leak of 6.5 gal per minute will lose more water than a main break every 90 days. Furthermore, it typically will run undetected for several years.

In such an instance, an automatic meter reading network would help notify engineers. These experts can respond with quick repairs before a leaky pipe continues to lose water—perhaps our most valuable resource—drop by drop.

Be sure to review this month's *WWD* Meter Source special section, which begins on page 32, to learn about the latest metering trends and applications. The section offers a variety of information, including an article about how one rural utility was able to cut meter-reading labor by 85% using automated meter reading.

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- WEFTEC Product Showcase
- MBRs
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- Sludge Treatment
- Instrumentation