

# Surviving and Thriving in Any Condition



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The 2010 *WWD* State of the Industry Report featured in this issue (page 11) reveals some of the critical concerns surrounding the water and wastewater industry in 2010 and in the months ahead.

The report was conducted online by ABR Research Inc., which surveyed a random sample of 10,000 *WWD* readers. Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents' primary job function is engineering; 29% have an operations function; 20% are in government administration; and 10% are in a technical job function.

For a third consecutive year, readers reported that state and federal regulations are the most important industry issues that will have a direct impact on their facilities in the upcoming 24 months. Issues such as funding, maintenance and the economy came in close behind.

Similar to previous years, the report indicated that the water workforce continues to age. Currently, the average age is 54, and more than one-quarter are 60 years or older. Because of the economic conditions, water municipalities have had to cut jobs and do more with less. Therefore, as experienced talent exits the industry, young professionals are not going to be faced with unlimited availability of job openings.

The rough shape of the economy also has had a significant impact on infrastructure funding. Speculations about the outcome of this financial crisis continue.

While I would like to leave economic predictions to the experts, my guess is that funding challenges are not going to loosen their grip in 2011.

According to surveyed respondents, less than half (40%) stated that their operating costs have increased from 2009 to 2010 while funding options haven't.

With the national deficit clock ticking closer and closer to a staggering \$14 billion, additional federal funding help is unlikely. This means that our industry is going to have to find different funding resources.

States will likely have to turn to the private sector for funding assistance, and utilities are going to have to look for ways to gain public support to drive water investment, as well as reevaluate the true value of water and the services they offer.

But it is not just a rough ride ahead. The industry is constantly looking for ways to do business smarter, leaner and greener. Many sectors have capitalized on the green movement by cutting down on energy consumption and saving money on operational costs. Others have turned to new technologies that explore ways to turn waste into profit.

As far as where existing municipal dollars will be allocated over the next 24 months, surveyed respondents identified monitoring equipment, source water/water-shed protection and sewer/collection systems as the three critical areas where the biggest portion of their budgets will be invested.

Perhaps the road ahead will remain bumpy in 2011, but if we are to take the glass-half-full approach, the tough economic times of the last three years have clearly demonstrated that our industry can certainly survive and even thrive in any condition.

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