

## Water

## Smart BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

By Rebecca F. West

Utility-business partnerships promote water stewardship



*Today's water utilities play a major role in defining and supporting sustainable water stewardship for the communities they serve. Their mission of protecting public health and the environment through the provision of reliable water and wastewater services to customers is challenged by impacts from climate change, economic change and people change (e.g., population growth, urbanization, land-use practices). These impacts are requiring water utilities to rethink and remodel their operational and business practices to better manage the dynamic realities of water quantity and quality resources and the changing expectations of customers and stakeholders.*

This article will share how Spartanburg Water is working effectively with its industrial customers to define a shared vision and purpose of water stewardship. Spartanburg Water leveraged public and private assets to support environmental protection, economic development and shared risks to the benefit of the watershed and community of Spartanburg, S.C.

#### Spartanburg Water

Spartanburg Water is a medium-sized drinking water and wastewater utility. In order to achieve its mission of "providing quality drinking water and wastewater services to its region in a reliable manner" while remaining "proudly committed to protecting public health, being good stewards of the environment and supporting its community's desired quality of life," it owns and operates the following assets:

- Three drinking water facilities with a combined design capacity of 92.5 million gal per day (mgd);
- Nine wastewater facilities with a combined design capacity of 29 mgd;
- 87 wastewater pump stations;
- 13 water storage facilities;
- 940 miles of wastewater collection system;
- 1,300 miles of drinking water distribution system; and
- Five dams and three surface water reservoirs.

In addition, Spartanburg Water works closely with 52 industrial and commercial customers to provide needed water resources and wastewater treatment capacity to support their business viability. The utility realizes that commercial and industrial customers are striving to improve their operational efficiencies by incorporating "closed-loop," or water recycling, processes.

Moreover, today's commercial and industrial customers desire to minimize any water-related risks to their businesses by:

- Ensuring local supplies of water resources and wastewater capacity are adequate and viable;
- Providing assurance to investors, financiers and

other stakeholders that water-related risks are adequately addressed for business resiliency; and

- Incorporating responsible water stewardship and environmental protection practices in their business model to support expectations from local stakeholders, customers and investors.

Such business philosophies and practices by some of Spartanburg Water's commercial and industrial customers have provided an opportunity for the utility to effectively engage with these customers and support the application of responsible water policy.

#### Operation Principles

Spartanburg Water understands that in order to support sustainable water stewardship, it must encourage and foster the Principles for Responsible Water Policy Engagement with its commercial and industrial customers. These principles, referenced from the United Nations Global Compact and Pacific Institute's *The CEO Water Mandate Guide to Responsible Business Engagement with Water Policy*, are as follows:

- **Principle 1: Advance sustainable water management.** Responsible corporate engagement in water policy must be motivated by a genuine interest in furthering efficient, equitable and ecologically sustainable water management.
- **Principle 2: Respect public and private roles.** Responsible corporate engagement in water policy entails ensuring that activities do not infringe upon, but rather support, the government's mandate and responsibilities to develop and implement water policy. Acting consistently with this principle includes business' commitment to work within a well regulated (and enforced) environment.
- **Principle 3: Strive for inclusiveness and partnerships.** Responsible engagement in water policy promotes inclusiveness and equitable, genuine and meaningful partnerships across a wide range of interests.

- **Principle 4: Be pragmatic and consider integrated engagement.** Responsible engagement in water policy proceeds in a coherent manner that recognizes the interconnectedness between water and many other policy arenas. It is a proactive approach, rather than responsive to events, and it is cognizant of and sensitive to the environmental, social, cultural and political contexts in which it takes place.
- **Principle 5: Be accountable and transparent.** Companies engaged in responsible water policy are fully transparent and accountable for their role in a way that ensures alignment with sustainable water management and promotes trust among stakeholders.

By applying these principles in its business practices with industrial and commercial customers, Spartanburg Water has been able to better meet their water and wastewater needs, encourage water conservation practices by the customers and further the goals of sustainable water stewardship within the community.

#### Industrial Case Study

In 2008, a local Spartanburg industry that focused on recycling materials for post-consumer use (e.g., plastics, recovering silver from used photo film) formed a joint venture with a major U.S.-based beverage provider to begin recycling plastic bottles for reuse such that the beverage provider could effectively recycle every pound of plastic that was used to bottle its products distributed in the U.S. The joint venture between the recycler and beverage companies resulted in an expansion of the local Spartanburg industry such that they could realize a 100% increase in potable water demand and the need for additional wastewater pretreatment capacity.

As Spartanburg Water began working with the local recycling industry, it was discovered that the partnering beverage company understood and incorporated many of the Principles for Responsible Water Engagement within its business practices and desired to find ways to recycle a major portion of the water used in the bottle recycling process so as not to double the current

demand for potable water from Spartanburg Water. The commitment to water conservation by the recycling industry supported Spartanburg Water's goal of encouraging water stewardship, and as a result, the utility provided a defined amount of additional wastewater treatment capacity to the recycling industry for a three-year period at no additional cost to the industry.

This arrangement between Spartanburg Water and the recycling industry was developed to allow the recycling industry time to design, build and improve its water recycling capabilities throughout the bottle recycling process. This win-win solution provided the needed flexibility to the recycling industry as it started up a new business process, enabled water conservation, supported local economic development and continued to provide environmental and water quality protection because of the availability of wastewater capacity managed by Spartanburg Water.

This is just one example of how Spartanburg Water is working with its industrial and commercial customers to further a sustainable water stewardship future. There are other examples of how the Principles for Responsible Water Engagement have been applied with positive results for the customer, the community and Spartanburg Water. The staff of Spartanburg Water continues to explore creative strategies to address the needs of industry, support economic development, better manage its water resources and achieve its mission of protecting public health and the environment. **WWD**

Rebecca F. West is deputy general manager of engineering and technical services for Spartanburg Water. West can be reached at [rfwest@spartanburgwater.org](mailto:rfwest@spartanburgwater.org) or 864.580.5648.

For more information, write in 1103 on this issue's Reader Service Card or visit [www.wwdmag.com/lm.cfm/wd031103](http://www.wwdmag.com/lm.cfm/wd031103).

## SECURE PRECAST CONCRETE BUILDINGS



**DURABLE    NO FOUNDATION REQUIRED    QUICK-INSTALL    VERSATILE**




### Buildings to Meet All Your Needs

- Pre-engineered & outfitted
- Standard & custom sizes
- Maintenance-free, all-concrete construction
- Resists vandalism, fire, blast
- Styles to match any setting
- Lifetime roof – 100+ years
- Electronic drawings and specification packages available
- Clear span sizes up to 40' x 200'



**EASI-SET® WORLDWIDE**  
Licensor of Precast Concrete Products

**(866) 252-8210**  
[www.EasiSetBuildings.com/WWD](http://www.EasiSetBuildings.com/WWD)

Write in 109