

By Elisabeth Lisican



Learning by Example

Flint. Brazil. California. The world is wide, and so is the range of water woes contained in it. As Flint fades from the national stage it has had since January, we in the water industry must never forget. The perfect storm of bad management and bad decisions corroded the public's trust and undoubtedly raised alarms for any other U.S. city with problems and old pipe. W&WD addresses these concerns in a special section on Flint, "Lessons From Flint" (p. 23).

Fortunately, this wide world of problems also has a host of solutions, and that's why I'm eager to be traveling to Munich May 30 to June 3 to attend IFAT 2016 and witness a world of innovations.

While there has been such a focus this year on "what not to do" in regard to Flint, we must switch gears now and focus on all the places that "got it right" in terms of tackling their water woes. That's why in our Flint special section, W&WD also features a report on Madison, Wis., which embarked on a full lead pipe replacement (p. 26).

"Madison is a good example of a replacement program," said Peter Binney, vice president of sustainable infrastructure for engineering consultant Merrick & Co. and a former director of Aurora (Colo.) Water. "They know that the issue is there; they found something that was cost-effective, and are stepping through it."

There are other cities that are creating models for others to follow.

According to the American Water Works Assn. (AWWA), the Boston Water and Sewer Commission offers customers \$1,000 direct credits toward the cost of removing lead service line and two-year, interest-free payment schedules for the balance of the work.

In Lansing, Mich., just 50 miles from Flint, the utility had replaced all but 650 of its 14,000 lead service lines in just more than a decade by January 2016, using money generated from general ratepayers, according to AWWA.

"As a profession we do try to share case studies with each other," Binney said. "But I have to say, even with the water utility I was involved with, the institutional knowledge and the human factor is just as big of an issue. And how or if you respond to these types of things."

One thing that must change across the board: the presumption of pristine waters as a given, "that water, like food safety and like flipping the switch of electrics, is something that we just have in our lives," Binney said.

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