

Viewpoint

Written by Jeff Eger, Executive Director, Water Environment Federation (WEF)
Friday, 14 December 2012 14:15



Rebuilding Our Water Infrastructure

As members of the water profession—or *simply as water users*—I believe we can all agree that we are at a critical point for water. We can no longer afford to ignore or push aside the state of our water and wastewater infrastructure as every American company, job and citizen is dependent on this vital resource and the vast network of pipes, utilities and reservoirs that supports it.

More than 800,000 miles of water pipes and 600,000 miles of sewer lines support America's private and public water consumption. Major renovations are needed in water and wastewater infrastructure across the United States. Much of this infrastructure was created a century ago and is no longer operating at an efficient level. Aged pipes and plants are fast approaching a critical point where immediate action needs to be taken. If money and time fails to be committed toward our water and wastewater utilities, Americans are likely to face service disruptions, water main breaks and threats to public health.

With millions of Americans out of work, now is the perfect time to focus on our water infrastructure. The National Association of Utility Contractors (NAUC) estimates that every \$1 billion invested in water infrastructure represents 26,000 possible jobs. The NAUC also estimates that every public dollar invested in America's water structure produces a \$6.35 private long-term GDP. The value of job creation in water infrastructure has been seen by the Department of Commerce (DOC), as well. The DOC recently said that each job created in the local wastewater industry contributes 3.68 jobs to the national economy and economic value across multiple industries. Clean water and wastewater services support \$50 billion per year in the recreation industry, \$300 billion in coastal tourism and \$45 billion in the fishing industry, among others. We cannot deny the impact that investment in our water infrastructure has on job creation.

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Public safety depends heavily on well-functioning water and wastewater utilities. Clean water and sanitation have saved countless lives in the U.S. While water-related diseases like cholera and dysentery may no longer pose a significant threat to our nation's health, spills from aging, underfunded infrastructure are a growing problem. Severe, "new normal" weather events—*such as*

Hurricane Sandy

—further demonstrate the necessity of a reliable water infrastructure.

If there is a single issue on which all political platforms should agree, I believe water safety is it. The quality of life our nation is dependent upon demands the preservation of clean, safe drinking water that is accessible to all. Furthermore, innovative technologies are fueled by resilient infrastructure and serve to keep America competitive.

As our leaders look to the future, please keep in mind the promises made during this last campaign cycle. In their 2012 election platforms, both the Democratic and Republican parties promised to attend to the nation's water supply and ensure that it remains clean and dependable. I urge you to hold our leaders accountable for keeping rural water and sewer infrastructure front and center. The Obama Administration's investment in rural water and wastewater infrastructure projects thus far has already safeguarded the health of 18 million residents and resulted in job creation. Let's keep this momentum going and continue to move America forward.

For more information on this topic, please visit www.waterforjobs.org . **MT**