

FLORIDA SECTION AWWA – Business Practices Handbook

Section 1.0 **Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest Guidelines, Ideas, and Toolbox**

Goal: This section of the handbook strives for consistency among the regional, state, and internationally held contests, while retaining flexibility among the regions to allow customization to meet the needs of each regional demographic fingerprint.

1.1 **Objectives**

The “Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest” is held annually by the regions within the Florida Section of the American Water Works Association (FSAWWA). The winners from these regional events are invited to participate in the statewide contest typically held each April at the Florida Water Resources Conference (FWRC). Subsequently, the winner of the State of Florida’s contest is invited to compete at the "People's Choice" and the “Best of the Best Tap Water Taste Tests” held at the Annual Conference & Exposition (ACE) in June of each year. Although true of the Association’s contest but importantly in this document to the FSAWWA, both the regional and statewide events offer the opportunity to help build excitement and pride within the industry. Additionally, they provide the potential for outreach to the public through the media and diversity of members serving on the judging panels that ideally represent a cross-section of the community at large. Traditionally, water utilities have been considered “the silent industry,” but with today’s ever-increasing involvement and thirst for knowledge by the public we serve, it is important to show that we perform “technical miracles everyday” in providing safe drinking water and to maintain the “public trust” and confidence.

This section of the Business Practices Handbook outlines basic guidelines for the regional event based on the existing state rules. Ideas that have been gathered from “lessons learned” by past regional events are also included for consideration as an enhancement to the previous guidelines provided to the regional chairs. In addition, a “toolbox” has been developed with templates and examples from various regions and in some cases the product of a combination of regional documents.

1.2 **AWWA Guidelines for the Annual Conference and Exposition (ACE) “Best of the Best Water Taste Test”**

<http://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/public-affairs/public-affairs-events/taste-test.aspx>

Each year at the AWWA Annual Conference & Exposition (ACE), winners of AWWA Section taste tests may compete for the title of "People's Choice" and the “Best of the Best Tap Water Taste Tests”.

The existing AWWA guidelines include eligibility, requirements, and contest judging for the AWWA ACE event along with links to “How to conduct a section taste test” and access to a public affairs toolkit that sections can use as a resource. Sections 1.2.1 Eligibility, 1.2.2 Requirements, and 1.2.3 Contest Judging of this document are taken directly from the AWWA website at the link shown above.

1.2.1 Eligibility – ACE

1. The People's Choice and Best of the Best Tap Water Taste Tests are open to the most recent winners of AWWA Section taste tests (the previous year's winner if they hold their test after ACE; the current year's winner if they hold their test before ACE).
2. Section winners must not have incurred any state or federal drinking water violations (MCL, monitoring, recordkeeping, etc.) during the previous 12 months.
3. The local utility for the ACE host city and the previous year's Best of the Best winner will be invited to participate in the taste test as well.

1.2.2 Requirements – ACE

1. Personal attendance is required for the competition. If there will not be a representative from a competing water system attending ACE, the director of the system may appoint an alternate representative from the Section to submit their sample and attend the contest on their behalf.
2. Six samples should be sent, each in a one liter container. Glass containers are preferable, but utilities can use the container of their choosing. Each sample should be clearly identified with the name of the water system and Section it represents.
3. Samples must be shipped to the location specified by the date specified. If utilities have issues shipping their samples, they may email Deirdre Mueller at dmueller@awwa.org.
4. Samples will be served at room temperature, to help the judges better assess each sample.
5. Section winners who have incurred any state or federal drinking water violations (MCL, monitoring, recordkeeping, etc.) during the previous 12 months are not eligible to compete. Questions about this policy may also be addressed to Deirdre Mueller at dmueller@awwa.org.

1.2.3 Contest Judging – ACE

1. Judging for the People's Choice award will be open to all ACE attendees
2. The official Best of the Best judging panel will be a mix of local public figures and flavor-profile analyzers.
3. Samples will be judged on a 10-point scale from Good (1) to Best (10).
4. Scores will be tabulated and the winner will be announced immediately following the contest.
5. Only the winning three samples will be announced – samples will not be ranked nor will scores be released.

1.3 FSAWWA Guidelines for the Annual “Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest” at the FWRC

The guidelines in this section are used to govern the statewide contest held annually at the FWRC in April or May. An effort was made to maintain as much consistency as possible with AWWA guidelines, to maximize success potential at the ACE contests.

1.3.1 Eligibility - FSAWWA Drinking Water Day Annual Statewide Contest

1. Each region shall submit one entry (the winner of their regional contest) to the state contest.
2. Each Regional Chair is responsible for submitting the contact information for the winner and runner-up to the state contest coordinator.

1.4 Regional Guidelines for FSAWWA Conducting “Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest”

1.4.1 Eligibility - FSAWWA Regional Contests

1. Each Region shall invite all public or private utilities that operate water production facilities located within the geographical area of their region to participate as entrants to the “Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest” (Contest).
2. Each entrant shall submit a maximum of one independent system sample. Entrants that operate more than one water production facility are limited to a single sample, and must select their best sample in a particular year from all of their facilities.
3. Contestant membership in AWWA/FSAWWA is encouraged.

1.4.2 Requirements - FSAWWA Regional Contests

1. Samples shall be collected only from the distribution system and **no more than 24 hours prior** to the test. Each sample should clearly identify the name of the utility, and be covered until it reaches the volunteer(s) contest planner(s) identified as the contest point person or organizer, to avoid any potential for the judges to observe which sample represents which utility.
2. Each entrant shall submit a minimum of one (1) gallon of the sample in either glass or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic bottles. Additional gallons may be requested if needed. Glass is the preferred container.
3. Samples shall be delivered an hour before the event and at **room temperature**, to allow for any tastes or odors that are present to be detected more easily, for more accurate judging, and to conform to the AWWA requirements. To ensure sample temperature consistency, all samples shall be maintained at the same uniform temperature for a period of time as specified by the particular region before judging occurs. Samples may be delivered in person and a utility representative should be present at the contest.
4. By submitting a sample, each entrant affirms that there are no state or federal drinking water violations (MCL, monitoring, recordkeeping, etc.) violations for the current and prior calendar year.

1.4.3 Contest Judging - FSAWWA Regional Contests

1. The Contest shall be conducted using blind samples only - samples shall not be ranked by utility, nor will scores be released. This needs to be stressed to all participants, attendees, and others that may inquire about the results.
2. One entrant shall be named "Winner," one entrant shall be named "Runner Up," and all other entrants shall be named "Honorable Mention." (This is unless it is inappropriate for the particular region based on number of entrants to designate a "Runner Up.") Some regions may have a considerable number of entrants and wish to have up to 3 top samples identified for recognition. Beyond the winner and runner up, the remaining entries will not be ranked, nor will the scoring be released outside the scoring team. This needs to be stressed to contestants and other attendees or interested parties.
3. It is recommended that all entrants shall receive a plaque or trophy in lieu of certificates, including Honorable Mentions. Future consistency efforts will evaluate the potential of a standardized award and if regional funds prohibit the investment, how to conquer that challenge.
4. Award of the trophy(ies) should be made by a regional or section board member at the participant's governing board meeting or workshop. If appropriate, a few speaking points to increase awareness about the organization, the utility, the importance of safe drinking water, and the pride in the utility in winning the award and future participation in the statewide event.
5. An effort shall be made to include media representatives as judges to ensure media coverage. Outreach to the public and a positive message are key to furthering familiarity and increased awareness of the industry to customers.
6. An effort shall be made to provide equal representation across service areas when selecting judges.
7. The specifics and execution of the event may vary per region, however, consistency with the statewide and the Association guidelines are preferred. This is so utilities are not surprised or at a disadvantage by different guidelines as winners move up to the next level of competition.

Ideas and tips to consider for regional contest judging:

- Ideas for potential judge selection may include: elected officials, media representatives, FSAWWA board members, visiting AWWA board members, commercial business representatives, flavor profile analyzers, Chamber of Commerce members, water management district governing board members, other professional associations, homeowner association board members, or other potential objective candidates.
- A region has had a primary or secondary grade student as a judge, which has generated media interest.
- Letters to potential judges should be sent out at least several weeks in advance with a followup phone call, preferably by a personal contact. A thank you letter, a Section pin, and/or certificate should be given to each judge (see "Toolbox" section for templates or examples).

- It may be preferred to identify the winner and runner up (or how you have identified your top awards), and leave the other samples unranked.
- Some regions have conducted a “preliminary round” to identify a smaller pool of entrants as finalists to limit the length of the contest since many are held over a limited timeframe.
- Categories may be used such as “surface water sources,” by size of utility or number of customers, treatment type, etc. However, a “best in show” overall winner will need to be identified for participation in the statewide event along with a runner-up (if appropriate.)
- The suggested scale for judging is from 1 (good) to 10 (best), with the winner having the highest score. This scale matches the scale used at the AWWA ACE event.
- Categories for judging should be developed with at least an “overall” category to select the best entry. Judging attributes can be identified such as “color,” “odor,” “clarity,” “flavor,” or other (see the Toolbox for suggested scoring templates and examples).

1.4.4 Planning the Event - FSAWWA Regional Contests

Every region has its own unique characteristics that are considered when planning an event. Demographics such as population, land use, number of utilities, business culture, and participation (all aspects) will affect the design of the agenda, the selection of the judges, and designation of the time, style, and venue. Historically, regions have conducted the contest in a variety of ways from a casual lunch meeting to a formal dinner, keynote speaker, and band. Some have doubled as a fundraiser for “Water for People” or the Likins Scholarship, and some cost nothing at all. There are many ways to conduct a successful event resulting in a taste test winner. While the eligibility, requirements, and judging criteria are generally consistent, the effectiveness of the event can be achieved in many different ways. It is important to identify the purpose, audience, and program agenda based on the goals of the region:

1. Purpose of the event – To promote the drinking water industry is the primary purpose of the contest. “Keep it fun!” Overall, determine the best tasting water entry for the region. Determine whether the contest will be a part of a regional meeting, a media and/or community event, a formal event, a lunch meeting, fun and casual, or a technical event. It is suggested that the contest be the main focus of the event.
2. Targeted audience – Keeping in mind that the purpose of the event is to promote the drinking water industry by participating in the contest, identify the target audience and market the event accordingly. [AWWA's Public Communication Toolkit](#) is available on the AWWA website with a comprehensive general guide for event planning. There is also a document on the FSAWWA website that outlines basic event planning.
3. Program agenda - Keep in mind the regional purpose, goals and audience for the event. Depending on these parameters, design your agenda to meet expectations. Agenda items such as introductions, thanks, organizational and utility information, membership and volunteer opportunities, the importance of safe drinking water in ensuring public health and safety can be considered.

1.4.5 Taste Test Toolbox - FSAWWA Regional Contests – Templates and Examples

(UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

GUIDELINES FOR BEST TASTING DRINKING WATER CONTEST – STREAMLINED VERSION (Can be used by regions to send to potential utility contestants)

The following guidelines shall govern each Regional Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest. Each region shall submit one entry (the winner of their regional contest) to the state contest. The Regional Chair is responsible for submitting the winner's contact information to the state contest coordinator.

1. All Regions shall advertise this event as the "Best Tasting Drinking Water Contest".
2. Each Region shall invite all public or private utilities that operate water production facilities located within the geographical area of their region to participate as entrants.
3. Each entrant shall submit a maximum of one independent system sample. Entrants that operate more than one water production facility are limited to a single sample, and must select their best sample in a particular year from all of their facilities.
4. Samples shall be collected only from the distribution system and no more than 24 hours prior to the test. Each sample should clearly identify the name of the utility.
5. Each entrant shall submit a minimum of one (1) gallon of the sample in either glass or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic bottles. Additional gallons may be requested if needed.
6. Samples shall be tasted at room temperature, to allow for any tastes or odors that are present to be detected more easily. All samples shall be maintained at the same uniform temperature.
7. By submitting a sample, each entrant affirms that there are no state or federal drinking water violations (MCL, monitoring, recordkeeping, etc.) for the current and prior calendar year.
8. The Contest shall be conducted using blind samples only - samples shall not be ranked by utility, nor will scores be released.
9. One entrant shall be named "Winner," one "Runner Up" (if appropriate), and all other entrants shall be named "Honorable Mention".
10. All entrants shall receive a plaque or trophy in lieu of certificates, including Honorable Mentions.
11. An effort shall be made to include media representatives as judges to ensure media coverage. An effort shall be made to provide equal representation across service areas when selecting judges.
12. The specifics and execution of the event may vary per region.