

AWWA “Interesting Times: Water in a Time of Turbulence” Roundtable Recap

The AWWA *Interesting Times: Water in a Time of Turbulence* roundtable brought together an insightful discussion on the many forces shaping today’s water industry. Each panel offered a valuable perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing water professionals in these turbulent times.

Is the Water Industry Really in Turbulence?

One of the opening questions asked was, “*Is the water industry actually in a time of turbulence?*” While most in the room already knew the answer, the conversations that followed reaffirmed the realities that keep water professionals awake at night.

The first panel focused on current and evolving regulatory and legislative activities influencing the sector. A central theme was affordability—a concept that takes on different meanings for utilities across the nation. With a growing number of capital projects and increasing financial pressure, utilities are seeking every funding opportunity available to provide safe, clean drinking water to their communities.

Panelists noted that utilities must constantly adapt to major federal and local regulatory changes—often amid broader political shifts. As one panelist remarked, “*This is crazy!*” The sentiment resonated across the room, capturing the uncertainty that defines today’s water industry.

Cutting Through the Noise

How can utilities navigate such constant change? One key takeaway was the importance of distinguishing between what is noise and what isn’t. Despite the challenges, panelists remained optimistic about the industry’s future. As education and collaboration with lawmakers grow, so too will trust and understanding. Ultimately, water issues transcend political divisions because they are bipartisan necessities that safeguard public health and future generations.

Emerging Conversations: Water Reuse

Another major discussion centered on water reuse; a topic no longer confined to water scarce regions. As data centers continue to expand nationwide, more states are exploring water reuse strategies to meet rising demand. For example, Ohio is already developing reuse guidelines, while some Eastern states are considering incorporating treatment and reuse costs into billing structures for data centers. These developments signal a broader shift toward sustainable water management practices across the country.

Legal and Management Perspectives

The second panel delved into legal and management perspectives on evolving federal and state developments, covering familiar topics such as lead and copper, PFAS, and biosolids—issues already well-known to Illinois utilities. However, panelists also highlighted a lesser-discussed emerging contaminant: 1,4-Dioxane. This compound, found in common products like car washes,

cosmetics, and even detergents, has been shown to have carcinogenic properties and is gaining regulatory attention nationwide.

The Illinois Section AWWA remains dedicated to keeping members informed about such emerging contaminants. As part of our Mission Monday series, we will feature a discussion on 1,4-Dioxane on February 23rd. To register, visit our [event page](#).

Continuing the Conversation

The *AWWA Interesting Times: Water in a Time of Turbulence* roundtable sparked essential conversations about the state of the water industry. But this is just the beginning. Utilities are encouraged to continue these discussions—locally, statewide, and nationally.

A great way to stay engaged is by participating in ISAWWA Water Utility Council meetings and attending the AWWA Water Matters! DC Fly-In in April.

For more information, please contact Kali Spain at kali@isawwa.org.