Small Systems Committee Report

Conference sessions included talks on distribution, finance, information technology, management, water efficiency and treatment, and water tank maintenance. Talks included the following: Straight Talk About Water Finance Issues (Baker Tilly & Public Service Commission); Ensuring the Financial Viability of Small Water Systems: Wisconsin's Approach (Public Service Commission); Concepts of Water Loss Control (M.E. Simpson); Upgrading Your Meters: The Why, What, How and WOW! (Sensus & HD Waterworks); Mystery 101: The Case of the Missing Water (SEH); Finding Water in the Desert: Abbotsford's Quest for Sustainable Water (City of Abbotsford and SEH), and A Design Build Approach to Water Tank Maintenance (SEH).

Our Small Systems Reception was a huge success this year; we hosted over 40 guests! Appreciation goes to everyone who took the time to stop by and discuss small systems over beer and snacks. Our thanks to the reception sponsors for their contributions, and HydroDesigns for their contribution of Home Depot gift cards and pulltabs.

Lori Huntoon, PG
Committee Chair
Fehr Graham

Log onto www.wiawwa.org, click on Professional and Technical Resources, and scroll down to Small Systems under Communities and Resources Pages for tools, reports and information pertaining to Small Systems.

Baxter & Woodman is an industry leader in all areas of water supply, treatment, storage, distribution, planning and conservation.

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Please notify us if you had a NAME, COMPANY NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE OR FAX NUMBER, OR E-MAIL ADDRESS change so we can update our records. Complete the “Contact Information Change” form on our website at: www.wiawwa.org
Getting Water Customers to Correct Their Cross Connections

By: Gary McLaren
CCC Program Advisor - HydroDesignInc.com

In the 2012 spring issue of the WWA Newsletter, DNR Drinking Water Engineer Charlie Cameron, wrote a great article covering many of the required aspects and challenges of implementing an effective comprehensive Cross Connection Control (CCC) Program as outlined in the NR 810.15 regulation. To supplement that informative article, I would like to share with you a few paragraphs about an unavoidable situation of any CCC Program: how do we get water customers to spend money on correcting cross connections within their own plumbing systems?

The nuts and bolts of a good comprehensive CCC Program come into action after a building is surveyed and identified to be non-compliant with the state plumbing codes (SPS 382.41) related to cross connections and backflow prevention. Assembling all of the CCC program components into a written plan (binder) is one of the best foundations to build your CCC Program upon. Items in the written plan should include; a copy of the local CCC Ordinance, relevant plumbing code, survey notices, public education and program procedures.

Once a cross connection survey takes place at a home or non-residential building, a written (or digital) record must be retained for several reasons. Partially because NR 810.15 requires CCC Program recordkeeping, but mainly because a record is needed in order for the water customer to be informed of what exactly is wrong and what they must do to correct the cross connection hazard. From our experience in assisting communities large and small around the state, the water customer notification process is the most critical part (aside from the initial survey) of the cross connection control program.

A good notification process can help ensure consistent survey to compliance ratios for the annual DNR report due each March and can, most importantly, prompt elimination of cross connection hazards to the drinking water supply. Here are a few points that may help in getting water customers correct their cross connections:

First, if a water customer is informed they have cross connection issues to correct, it is important to provide clear written instructions with what to correct and even specify the specific location of each issue. Ideally, the non-compliance notice should involve more than just a copy of the CCC Survey form. Without clear instructions, water customers may mistakenly install unapproved devices, purchase unnecessarily expensive backflow preventers when only simple low cost versions are needed, or add to program costs by numerous calls to the water purveyor with questions.

The City of La Crosse utilizes a process of sending a formal non-compliance letter to each water customer in violation (residential and non-residential) with an additional page listing the cross connections. Critical details such as location and purpose of connection are indicated for thorough understanding. The itemized compliance list includes instructions as to which specific type of backflow preventer must be installed. Even the backflow preventer standard approval number is included for accuracy. The local CCC Ordinance is also referenced to inform the water customer that the corrections are mandatory.

Second, having knowledgeable staff (or specialized CCC consultant) available to receive water customer phone calls is another key point in getting the non-compliant water customers to open up the wallet and address the cross connection hazards in their plumbing system. The language used when addressing water customer questions or concerns has a direct effect on the perception the non-compliant water customers has of cross connection control. Either they will see the violation as unnecessary code enforcement or an opportunity to ensure safe drinking water within their own home or business.

In Bellevue, Wisconsin there is another good example of what can be done to help water customers comply when cross connections are identified. With the Bellevue non-compliant water customers, communications are kept simple; however specific details (sometimes unfamiliar to the water customer) are included in the dialogue. By referring
to the relevant plumbing codes and approval standards, both on the phone and in the notification process, the water customer receives consistent and supported reference points which plumbers, suppliers and building officials can verify quickly and accurately.

Each time the water customer is notified, the message should be conveyed that enforcement of the local CCC ordinance is necessary to ensure safe drinking water. Every water purveyor does have the legal authority (via the CCC Ordinance) to disconnect the water supply to a non-compliant service connection. This authority should be expressed in each notification step in conjunction with related plumbing code requirements and instructions for the corrective action. As a CCC program service provider around the state, we find that instead of shut off notices and closing of valves, consistent reinforcement and communication of the language within the local CCC ordinance associated with a due date is the most effective method of getting water customers to correct cross connections at their own expense.

For additional resources and a free CCC Program template, visit www.hydrodesignsinc.com/wwa.html or call Gary at 262-951-0059.

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