



American Water Works Association
Pacific Northwest Section
Inland Empire Subsection

February 5, 2019

Dear Board Trustees of the Pacific Northwest:

Small systems people are doing multiple jobs, wearing many hats. We've discovered some are operating several water districts without the help of office personnel or extra field hands. They are extremely strapped on resources, just getting CEU's, traveling to another town or county and taking time off work is a problem, because they don't have a sub or replacement. But their concern like ours is providing clean potable water.

The most important thing is for some community outreach and sharing of resources with these small systems. We at this point look to the direction of the Section to guide us in what we can and can't do regarding insurance and liability issues. We understand this has been developed in other sections, but we're not sure quite where to get that information. We've just heard rumors of it here in the Pacific Northwest.

A great example in our own backyard is when Airway Heights had their contamination issue with the water. This will be seen more and more around the nation as more military bases come forward with reports of flame retardant being dumped into their water supply.

It was neighboring water districts, North Spokane Irrigation District, and Irvin Water District along with the City of Spokane Water Dept. that came to the aid of the City of Airway Heights. Former workers now managers for other districts were called for the simple task of knowing where the shut off valves were for the main water system. The current workers didn't have this information, and the satellite director certified to oversee the water system was in another county, and

not familiar with the water system as these former workers were. It was through networking from AWWA, and that willingness to help someone in need that Small Systems stepped forward to help each other.

We had another small system step forward, and request a sand filtration class. We were working on that, but then the person that stepped forward couldn't help us with a place to hold the classes, so there we sat. There is still talk about doing this class through the Small Systems, but right now, some of the people working towards that are inundated with their own projects. Right now there is a huge amount of small towns and small systems trying to re do, repair, and rejuvenate their own water systems. The time is now for reaching out, and making ourselves known. Our goal is to basically be a conduit for the Section, and to let Small Systems know they have a place to turn to when they have a problem.

We had another occurrence, our small systems committee works strongly with the Inland Empire Subsection. A small systems operator came to one of our meetings, complaining that he'd gone to DOH asking for simplification of the reporting process, that he felt it was more geared to a large utility, and that pages and pages of questions was a waste of time because he didn't have any of that information. We explained to him that his voice is pretty lonely by itself, but with our connections, if we could on his behalf, reach out to our connections in DOH, and ask there be a simplification of the paper work for appropriate small systems, that we working together on this might have a better chance of being heard, and move towards positive change that makes sense for small systems, and cuts his paperwork time in half.

Our slow moving and simple process is to build trust, and to be there when we're needed, and to fulfill or direct whatever that need may be, to earn the trust and the loyalty of Small Systems. This can't be done in one fell swoop, or one yearly quarter. This is a systematic, slow opportunity of reaching out, letting people know we hear them, and we're their advocates, and that we are here to help.

We've also reached out to Greg Lukasik, who is currently running for AWWA VP. He has done phenomenal progress for rural waters in the Montana regions. We also note he does not call them Small, but Rural, so we're wondering if changing

the name to Rural Water would be more objective, and not so demeaning in name and might draw better attention to what we're trying to do and who we're trying to assist.

We have people willing to go out and train, but here's the thing... we can't decide what's best for them, and it's taking us a slow and trusting period to get that information, simply because these people don't have a lot of chat time. If we bring training to them, it has to be something that they need in order to be successful, and not something WE decide they need. That's where we felt we would do well with the Sand Filtration class, because it was very specific to a rather large area of several rural water districts. And that's where we're working to open the lines of communication, and just get word out that we're here for them.

We also had Michael Grimm from West Slope Water District reach out to us with several great ideas, and offers of assistance. He brought us ideas of Effective Utility Management, and explained that often Small Systems are the training ground or farm system for large systems and consultants. That the keys to concentrating on what small systems could do best is to help them identify when a task is practical, or needs to be hired out, creating a great working environment, and establishing strategic plans for operation goals. He advised some great webinars to share, and pointed us towards some other resources.

We have submitted articles on behalf of Small Systems in Water Matters that have engaged people, and had readers reach out to us and contact our group, as a positive start in our communication process.

To recap, our short term goals are to provide a better definition of who we are trying to include and what we can provide for a Small Utility. Are we helping single operators? Are we trying to aid the guy that's in charge of a single well head? Does a Small Utility serving 5,000 with sound discretionary funds need our assistance? How can we assist the struggling community that has a wife and husband staying awake at night, trying to protect their water because it's the right thing to do?

Going forward, our long term goals: come up with job sharing opportunities. What if we could have a water operator from another district come in and allow that one operator a break, or conference time, some sort of job share bank that people can apply to, and borrow or trade. Issues with this is liability concerns for property damage, or job related injuries, and approval from Board Members or signed waivers that release a shared utility from any monetary obligations. We'd like to encourage sharing resources between districts, or having a bigger utility willing to offer support or trade in resources when necessary.

We stepped away from a training track for this year's conference because of limited space constraints, but we have speakers and an educational track in the works for the 2020 conference.

We have tied ourselves with the Inland Empire Subsection, as all of our current officers are current or past Board members of that Subsection. Some of our accomplishments are intertwined with the Subsection. We share a lot of important information on our Face Book Page, and try to include and invite the smaller systems on a regular basis.

It's been baby steps, but we continue to gather interest, and see this as a valuable tactic to involve others into memberships, and to show the true integrity of AWWA.

The value is water. It's not about money. And we think over time, if we can start up that conversation, and reach out and connect, and prove that we are who we say we are, that's going to be the true integrity that pushes the Small Systems forward.

Respectively submitted,
Lance Peterson
Chair of Small Systems Committee
February 2019