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MISSION STATEMENT

"Protecting and preserving the water and wastewater resources of Rural Illinois through education, representation and on-site technical assistance".

On the Cover:

This photo was taken by Heather McLeod, IRWA Chief Membership Officer/ Event Coordinator, in Vandalia, Illinois.

Water Ways is the official publication of the Illinois Rural Water Association, P.O. Box 49, Taylorville, Illinois 62568, and is published quarterly for distribution to members as well as other industry associations and friends. Our website is www.ilrwa.org. Articles and photographs are encouraged. Advertising and submissions should be mailed to the above address or e-mail us at ilrwadb@ilrwa.org.

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Handling Complaints about Water and Wastewater Services

by Roger Noe, IRWA Deputy Director

Water and wastewater services are essential to public health, environmental protection, and the smooth operations of homes, businesses, and communities. When these services fail or do not meet customer expectations, complaints can arise about issues such as low water pressure, discolored water, sewage backups, unpleasant odors, billing errors, leaks, service interruptions, or delayed repairs. Handling complaints effectively requires more than simply recording the problem. It involves listening carefully, responding promptly, investigating fairly, communicating clearly, and taking action to prevent the issue from recurring. A well-managed complaints process can restore customer confidence and help water and wastewater systems improve their services.

Common water and wastewater complaints generally fall into several categories.

Water Quality: Discolored, cloudy, bad-tasting, or foul-smelling water.

Water Supply: Low pressure, interruptions, leaks, or no water

Wastewater: Blocked drains, sewage overflows, backups, or unpleasant odors

Billing and Metering: Unexpectedly high bills, inaccurate meter readings, or disputed charges.

Infrastructure: Damaged manholes, broken pipes, flooding, or unsafe utility cover.

Customer Service: Delayed responses, missed appointments, or unclear information

Environmental concerns: Pollution, illegal discharge, or contamination of water ways.

Some complaints may represent an immediate risk to health, safety, or the environment.

Establish a clear complaint procedure to ensure that every customer receives a consistent response. The procedure should explain how to submit a complaint, what the complaint is, when they can expect a response, how the complaint will be investigated, and what remedies or corrective actions may be available. Customers should be able to complain through several channels, such as telephone, email, written correspondence, or in person. Social media can send off a firestorm of comments and complaints with anything and everything. I would prefer the written response or in-person at the board meetings. Good complaint handling starts with active listening from all staff or board/council members. Allow the customer to explain the issue without unnecessary interruptions, ask clear questions about the problem, and acknowledge the inconvenience that the problem has caused. Give an approximate time the complaint will be looked at or resolved. We all know with water and wastewater this could be very hard to nail down the timeline with certain complaints or issues.





Every complaint should be recorded into a system where the utility can track progress, identify recurring problems, and how the complaint is being handled. The complaint form should include customer information, property or service information, date and time complaint was received, description of the complaint, meter readings, or other evidence, and the staff member who is handling the complaint. Complaints should be assessed according to their urgency and potential impact. A reported sewage overflow, for example, requires faster action than a routine request about a billing issue. High-priority complaints may include sewage entering a home, business, or public area, drinking water suspected to be contaminated, major water leaks, loss of water supply, and flooding caused by wastewater infrastructure. The utility should have a clear plan in responding to these types of issues. The investigation of the complaint should establish what happened, why it happened, and what actions are appropriate to resolve the complaint. Depending on the complaint this may involve checking service and maintenance records, review meter readings and billing history, testing water quality, testing water quality, discussions with staff, and compare complaints with other customers in the area. Investigations should be impartial and based on evidence. Staff should not dismiss a complaint simply because the cause is not immediately obvious. Customers should also be told if the investigation requires additional time, along the reason for the delay and the expected completion date.

Poor communication often causes more frustration than the original problem. Customers should receive information on how the complaint is being handled and if there are any precautions that the customer should take. If there is a water outage a plan should be made for supplying bottled water and how it will be distributed to the customers. Billing issues customers should receive clear explanation of how the bill was calculated. If an

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Handling Complaints about Water and Wastewater Services

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error has occurred, it should be corrected promptly. If the bill is accurate but unusually high because of a leak or increased consumption, the utility should explain this respectfully and provide practical advice on how to solve the high-water usage.

Learning from complaints is important information about the service weaknesses. Utilities should regularly analyze complaint data to identify repeated failures in the same location, delays in repairs, frequent billing disputes, infrastructure requiring replacement, gaps in staff training, and problem contractors. The goal should not be to reduce the number of complaints by discouraging customers from reporting problems. Instead, utilities should make it easy to complain and use the information to improve reliability and accountability.

Effective complaint handling is an essential part of providing reliable water and wastewater services. It requires accessible reporting channels, respectful communication, accurate records, risk-based prioritization, fair investigation, timely action, and meaningful follow-up. The best organizations do not treat complaints merely as problems to close. They use them as evidence of where services, infrastructure, communication, or policies can be improved. When customers feel heard and see their concerns lead to action, complaints can become an opportunity to strengthen public trust and improve the quality, safety and resilience of water and wastewater services.

Financial Trouble is all Around

by Clark Cameron, IRWA State Circuit Rider

In my position as State Circuit Rider for Illinois Rural Water Association, it is my job to help community water and wastewater systems with rate studies and financial analysis of those rates to ensure future financial stability. I have been doing these studies since 2018, and have completed hundreds of studies during that time. I have seen a wide variety of ways to accomplish the same goal for all of these systems, which is to provide enough revenue to keep the system financially stable, and have the ability to do repairs and upgrades as needed. But, in the last year or so, I have seen a disturbing trend with a number of systems that are very near bankruptcy, and are struggling to meet day-to-day expenses…some through no fault of their own.

One common trend, the whole time I have been doing this job, is that small towns seem to struggle the most, which is to be expected due to lack of a reliable tax base and not enough customers to share the expenses of maintaining the water and sewer systems. Often times, the governing board struggles to make rate changes, and it gets put off for years at a time, which then causes losses and larger raises to the rates at one time. Yearly changes help soften the effect of those raises and help keep pace with inflation. Another problem smaller towns face, is not having the ability to pay for qualified water and wastewater operators due to the lack of qualified operations specialists; and not having the resources to afford to pay for ones that are available. The one thing small towns need to always be aware of, is that the water and sewer departments are businesses and need to be operated as such.





The trend that has also seemed to start in the last year or two is that a number of regional water systems and co-ops are starting to struggle. This seems to be due to a number of factors, some that could have been controlled and some that could not. As everyone knows, the cost of everything has continued to rise since the Covid era caused prices to explode, so keeping pace has been challenging. Staying current with expenses has caused many systems to have to implement changes far above the 3% annual raise normally recommended. These are controllable and should be managed easily if the system stays vigilant and proactive.

One of the uncontrollable issues for regional systems and co-ops providing water, is member systems experiencing financial trouble. How does the provider respond to a system or town that fails to stay current on payments? Can a providing system shut off a whole town for non-payment or do the other customers have to subsidize the delinquent town? These are hard questions to answer due to the legal ramifications of whatever action that the providing system chooses. These are situations that have no definite answer that I have found, as yet.

The bottom line is that every water and sewer system owes it to their customers to be fiscally responsible and maintain rates sufficient enough to provide for the current expenses while also providing for future updates and repairs. It's a huge responsibility for sure, but one that is prudent and needed!

Schulte Supply Celebrates 40 Years in Business

Industrial Supply Company Reflects on Growth, Looks Ahead to Future

Edwardsville, Ill. – September 10, 2026 – Schulte Supply, a Midwest-based utility supplier, is proud to announce the celebration of its 40th year in business. The family-owned and operated business began in Edwardsville, Illinois, in 1986 with one employee and founder, president and CEO John Schulte, who, over the next four decades, transformed the company into a regional leader.

Today, Schulte Supply has expanded its offices and warehouses in three states and has a team of over 50 employees. It supports municipal and private utilities, including water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer and gas, with top-notch products and services, timely delivery and a commitment to customer service.

"I always wanted to have my own business," said Schulte. "Both sets of my grandparents, my parents and my brother were all successful in owning their own businesses, so you could say our family has entrepreneurial roots."

Out of his parents' storefront in downtown Edwardsville, Schulte served customers in Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky before expanding to their current location at 5998 Redbud Lane in Edwardsville, Illinois. Schulte Supply opened its second office and warehouse in St. Peters, Missouri, in 2007 due to customer demand for a Missouri location.

Despite the 2008 Great Economic Recession, Schulte Supply continued to grow, opening another branch in Independence, Missouri, in 2011. By 2023, Schulte Supply had ten geographical sales territories. In 2025, an additional branch location was added in Jacksonville, Arkansas. As of today, Schulte Supply has 15 geographic sales territories and four locations covering Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas and parts of Indiana and Kentucky.

"I have been very blessed to grow our organization over the years with good employees, loyal customers and vendor partners. I have even had two vendor partners that have been with me from day one," said Schulte. "It's fun to watch our employees, company, customers and vendor partners grow over time, and my hope is that Schulte Supply will continue to grow our sales and expand into other areas across the country."

Schulte Supply offers an extensive catalog of products and online ordering from various vendor partners and brands, including traffic signs, safety equipment, tools, machinery and more.

"We continue to grow by finding new products and services for our customers," Schulte said.



John Schulte, president and CEO of Schulte Supply, founded the company in 1986 in Edwardsville, Illinois, growing it into a regional leader in utility supplies across 15 sales territories, with four locations in Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas.

"We aren't perfect, but everyone at Schulte Supply tries to give our customers the best service possible, and we will continue do so," said Michael Schulte, operations and marketing consultant at Schulte Supply. "We offer 24/7/365 access for our customers, especially during emergencies or special off-hours requirements."

Schulte Supply and its team hope to continue its growth trend in the years to come. The company frequently recruits new talent and looks for opportunities in the marketplace to offer more products and services to its customers. To learn more about Schulte Supply or start your online order, visit schultesupply.com.

About Schulte Supply

Schulte Supply is a family-owned utility supply company based in the Midwest, supporting municipal and private utilities, including water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer and gas services. Founded in Edwardsville, Ill., in 1986, the company has since expanded into 15 sales territories and operates four locations serving customers throughout Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas and parts of Indiana and Kentucky. It offers a comprehensive catalog of top-rated products, timely delivery and a commitment to excellent customer service. To learn more about Schulte Supply or to start an online order, visit schultesupply.com.

A Day in the Life of a Circuit Rider: Chuck Woodworth

by Anglela Godwin

"Reprinted with permission from the National Rural Water Magazine" Aug 7, 2026

For Chuck Woodworth, what he loves most about his job as a Circuit Rider isn't a single project or a signature achievement. It's a moment — the one that happens over and over again when something clicks for the operator sitting across from him.

"Whenever I'm talking to somebody about basically anything, and I see them understand the answer and that light bulb comes on — that is the greatest thing for me," Chuck said.

As a Circuit Rider with the Illinois Rural Water Association (IRWA), Chuck has spent nearly three decades building a career around that light-bulb moment — one leak, one certification exam, one exasperated operator at a time. His path to that work, though, started somewhere entirely different.

Chuck Woodworth is a Circuit Rider with the Illinois Rural Water Association.Chuck Woodworth/IRWA.

From Farm Dealership to Water Plant

Chuck didn't set out to work in water. He intended to be a mechanic, following in the footsteps of his father and brother. From 1984 to 1987, he worked at a farm equipment dealership, one of five mechanics in the shop. When business slowed and people stopped bringing equipment in for repair, Chuck — as the newest hire — was the first to be let go.

Around the same time, the city he lived in was looking for a water plant operator. Chuck took the job, expecting it to be temporary.



Chuck Woodworth is a Circuit Rider with the Illinois Rural Water Association.Chuck Woodworth/IRWA.

"That 'temporary' position lasted 10 years," he chuckled, "and during that timeframe, I was able to achieve my Class A water operator's license for the state of Illinois."

Chuck spent a decade with the City of Sullivan, earning his top-level license and discovering, perhaps to his own surprise, that he had not only a knack but a genuine appreciation for the work. In 1997, a colleague who had been running IRWA's wellhead protection program let him know about an opening. Chuck applied and got the job, stepping into the role of Wellhead Protection Specialist.

He held that role for six or seven years, until the wellhead program lost its funding. As luck would have it, a Circuit Rider position became available around the same time, and he made the move that would define the rest of his career.

Looking back, Chuck says none of it was part of a plan. "I never once thought that I would be doing what I am now. I always thought I would be a mechanic," he said. "But the few years that I worked for the city, I really enjoyed doing what I was doing, and then when I started working for the Association, I liked it even better — going out and talking to other operators and helping them with different situations."

No Two Days Alike

Chuck struggled to describe a typical day because there simply isn't one. "It all depends on what calls you get," he explained. "One day I might be doing leak detection, and the next day I might be helping find a lost mainline valve or diagnosing a problem inside the water treatment plant. To me, that's the best part of it. I'm not doing the same thing day after day after day. And being able to help somebody — it really is the icing on the cake."

A single day on the road can illustrate just how varied the work gets. Chuck described one recent stretch that began before 7 a.m. and covered four stops: a conversation about a nitrification action plan and its requirements; a visit to troubleshoot chlorination feed rates and maintaining a residual; a stop to talk through filter media replacement and general maintenance; and a final meeting to discuss new well locations and guidance he'd gathered from the state water survey. Two of the stops were

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A Day in the Life of a Circuit Rider: Chuck Woodworth

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scheduled in advance; the other two he simply worked in along the way.

That kind of range is only possible because of the sheer breadth of Chuck's territory. He covers the central and eastern regions of Illinois up through the northern part of the state — 32 counties in total.

Across that territory, certain requests come up again and again: one-on-one operator certification prep; locating valves that have gone missing over the years; leak detection; and increasingly, sampling and planning work tied to Illinois' nitrification action plan requirements. But it's the certification work that clearly resonates most. "There's nothing like the feeling of working with somebody, and you're explaining something — especially some of the math — and it clicks with them. You can almost see the light bulb come on, and they're like, 'Oh man, that makes sense now!'" Chuck said. "To me, that's just awesome!"

The Skill of Asking the Right Questions

Technical know-how certainly matters in this job, but Chuck points to something less obvious as the real key to solving problems in the field: patience, and the discipline to hold off on a diagnosis until you have the full picture.

"If an operator says, 'Hey, this is what's going on,' and you don't ask other questions to go along with that, it's really kind of hard to figure out the real issue," Chuck explained. "I learned early on to not answer too quickly. It's better to ask more questions and get more information before you consider what the problem might be."

That approach paid off during one of the more memorable calls of his career. A system reported water loss at 65% and asked Chuck to find the leak. He spent hours searching, without success. "I couldn't find a leak anywhere, not even a small one," he recalled. The mystery was ultimately solved not with a leak locator but with a spreadsheet. Working with another Circuit Rider who conducts comprehensive rate studies, they discovered that a decimal point was misplaced in the billing program's multiplier. "So it turned out they were not actually losing water," Chuck explained, "but it wasn't being paid for."

Why Circuit Riders Matter

For Chuck, the value of the Circuit Rider program is clear when he thinks about the systems he serves. Many small Illinois communities operate with just one or two staff members responsible for everything — water, sewer, mowing, and anything else that needs doing. "Without us Circuit Riders and other Association staff members, that operator would have nobody to turn to and freely bounce questions or ideas off of," he noted. "Some of these small towns, they can't afford a $10,000 leak locate bill. I come in and do it for nothing because that's part of the program."

That access, provided at no cost to the system, is what makes the role indispensable to rural Illinois — and it's a big part of why Chuck has stayed in it for so long.

When asked what he's most proud of after 29 years in the water industry, Chuck doesn't point to a title or an award. He points to people, specifically the operators who've been able to obtain their certifications with his assistance. "I really wish I would have kept track of how many operators I helped to get certified," he said. Having achieved that goal himself on his own, Chuck wants to make sure no operator has to figure it out alone. "There's nobody I wouldn't help achieve that same goal. If somebody contacts me and they want to get certified, I'll do whatever I can to help them."

A Simple Case for the Work

Chuck's advice for anyone considering a career in water is grounded in the same plainspoken logic that guides everything he does. "You can live without electricity, you can live without natural gas, but you cannot live without water," he stated. "Everybody needs water that's safe to drink, and somebody has to be able to produce that safe drinking water. Without that, I don't know where people would be."

Nearly three decades after accepting what was expected to be temporary work, Chuck Woodworth has become a steady, essential presence for the communities and operators who depend on him. System by system, question by question, he keeps proving the same point: Rural Water work matters, and the greatest reward is giving someone the confidence to solve the next problem on their own. RW

Angela Godwin is a writer and editor specializing in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater topics. She is a principal partner and the director of editorial services with Rogue Monkey Media.

Cybersecurity and Small Rural Treatment Systems

by Scott Tozier, WW Quality Action Specialist

In light of the Cyber Attacks on many Midwest Treatment facilities Small rural water and wastewater systems increasingly depend on computers, internet connections, electronic controls, and automated equipment to provide safe and reliable drinking water. While this technology improves efficiency and reduces workload, it also creates cybersecurity risks that rural utilities must recognize and manage. Over 100 systems in 12 different states were attacked in one way or another from late July to August of this year.

For a small water system, a cyberattack may seem unlikely. However, the size of a utility does not determine whether it can become a target. Small systems often have limited staff, budgets, and cybersecurity expertise. They may also operate older equipment that was not originally designed to connect to modern networks or the internet.

What Does Cybersecurity Mean for a Water and Wastewater System?

Cybersecurity involves protecting computers, networks, electronic equipment, software, and data from unauthorized access, damage, or disruption. For water utilities, cybersecurity goes well beyond office computers.

Modern systems may use technology to monitor or control wells, pumps, storage tanks, chemical feed systems, pressure systems, SCADA systems, programmable logic controllers (PLCs), telemetry, remote monitoring equipment, security systems, billing software, and compliance records.

If an unauthorized person gains access to these systems, the result could be more serious than the loss of computer files. A cyber incident could interfere with alarms, communications, equipment operation, or an operator's ability to monitor the water system.

SCADA and Remote Access

SCADA systems are particularly important because they allow operators to monitor and sometimes control facility equipment from a computer or remote location. An operator may be able to view tank levels, pump status, pressures, alarms, and other operating information without being physically at the facility.

Remote access is extremely useful for small rural systems, especially when staffing is limited. However, remote connections must be properly secured. Access should be limited to authorized personnel, and vendors should receive only the access necessary to perform their work.

Where possible, operational technology should be separated from ordinary office networks. This can help prevent a problem on an employee's computer from spreading to critical control equipment.

Common Cybersecurity Weaknesses

Many cybersecurity incidents begin with basic weaknesses rather than highly sophisticated attacks.



Weak or shared passwords can make unauthorized access easier. Employees should have individual accounts and strong passwords whenever practical.

Inactive accounts should be removed promptly when employees or contractors leave the organization.

Outdated software and equipment can contain known security vulnerabilities. Systems should be maintained and updated according to manufacturers' recommendations and the utility's risk assessment.

Phishing emails are another common threat. An email may appear to come from a vendor, coworker, bank, or government agency. Opening a malicious attachment or clicking a fraudulent link can compromise a computer or network.

Lack of backups can make recovery much more difficult after an incident. Important operational and business information should be backed up, and utilities should periodically verify that backups can actually be restored.

A Practical Approach for Small Systems

Cybersecurity does not have to require a large budget or a full-time IT department. Small utilities can make significant improvements by concentrating on the basics.

First, create an inventory of computers, SCADA components, PLCs, network equipment, communication systems, software, and remote-access connections. The utility should know what technology it owns and what is connected to its network.

Second, identify equipment that is connected to the internet or other external networks. Unnecessary connections should be removed or appropriately secured.

Third, control access. Use strong passwords, multi-factor authentication when available, and individual user accounts. Employees and contractors should have only the access necessary to perform their duties.

Fourth, maintain reliable backups and keep important emergency information available offline. A backup plan that is accessible only through a compromised computer may not be useful during an emergency.

Employees and Training

Employees are one of the most important parts of

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cybersecurity. Staff should receive basic training on recognizing suspicious emails, protecting passwords, handling USB drives, reporting unusual computer activity, and verifying requests for sensitive information.

Creating an environment where employees are encouraged to report suspicious activity immediately can help prevent a small problem from becoming a major incident.

Incident Response and Physical Security

Every rural water and wastewater system should have a basic cybersecurity incident-response plan. The plan should identify who is responsible for responding, who should be contacted, and how the utility will continue operating if computerized systems become unavailable.

Contact information should include IT support, SCADA and equipment vendors, telecommunications providers, local emergency contacts, law enforcement, and appropriate state or federal agencies.

Physical security is also part of cybersecurity. Unauthorized access to control panels, network equipment, PLCs, computers, wells, pump stations, or treatment facilities can create cybersecurity risks. Critical equipment should be appropriately protected.

Conclusion

Cybersecurity is becoming an important part of overall system management…whether it be water or wastewater. Small rural utilities do not need to solve every cybersecurity issue at once. They can begin by understanding their systems, limiting access, protecting remote connections, maintaining backups, training employees, securing critical equipment, and developing an incident-response plan.

These basic steps can help protect a rural system's computer, control equipment, information, operations, and most importantly, its ability to provide safe and reliable drinking water to its customers.

IRWA in conjunction with NRWA provide several sources of additional assistance for small communities to consult with cyber security. All these resources are free of charge.

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When Things Go Wrong

by Richmond Adams, IRWA Source Water Protection Specialist

Emergencies are something that most water systems hope they never have to deal with, but sooner or later every system will have something go wrong. It could be a tornado, flood, power outage, water main break, chemical spill, equipment failure, or even something as simple as having your only operator become unavailable. When that happens, having a plan in place can make a bad situation much easier to manage.

Illinois requires every community water supply to have an emergency operations plan. That plan needs to cover how the system will continue providing water during emergencies such as earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and other disasters. It also needs to look at how an alternative supply of drinking water could be provided if the system is damaged, impaired or contaminated. The plan must be reviewed at least every three years and kept on site where it can be made available to the Illinois EPA.

That three-year review is a good minimum, but it is worth looking at your plan more often. Does it still have the correct phone numbers? Does everyone know where the plan is kept? If your normal operator is unavailable, does someone else know how to get the system running? Do you know who you would call if you needed a generator, water tanker, pumps or other equipment that your system does not have?

IEPA also requires community water supplies to notify the Agency when the safety of the supply is endangered. During normal business hours, systems should contact their Illinois EPA regional office. After hours, the emergency contact is the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), which will notify an Illinois EPA duty officer. This includes situations such as contamination and certain boil orders.

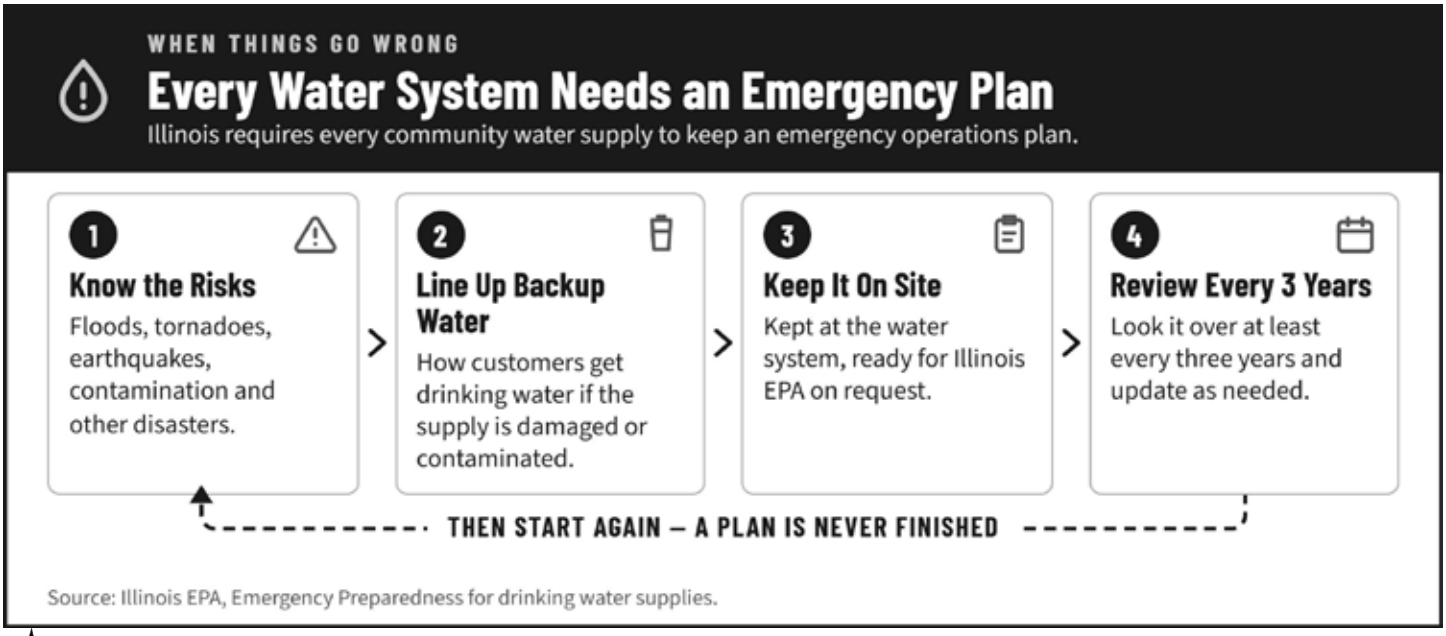
One of the most useful parts of emergency planning is figuring out ahead of time who can help when your own system cannot handle the problem. IEPA points systems toward mutual aid agreements with nearby water supplies and ILWARN when additional equipment or assistance is needed. If those options are not available, local or county emergency management can request additional resources through IEMA.



Backup power is another area worth checking. Illinois requirements call for community water supplies to have dedicated standby power capable of maintaining continued operation during power outages. It is one thing to have a generator sitting at the plant, but it is another to know that it will actually start, connect properly and run the equipment you need. Testing that equipment before an emergency is much easier than discovering a problem during a storm.

So, if you have not looked at your emergency plan recently, now is a good time. Pull it out and make sure the information is still accurate. Check your emergency contacts, backup power, equipment and mutual aid agreements. Think through what would happen if your primary operator could not get to the plant tomorrow morning. If you don't already have an emergency response plan or are looking to redo yours, a template can be found on the IRWA website.

You do not need to predict every possible emergency. The goal is to have a basic plan for what to do, who to call and where to get help when something unexpected happens. A few hours spent preparing now could save a lot of headaches when the next emergency comes along.





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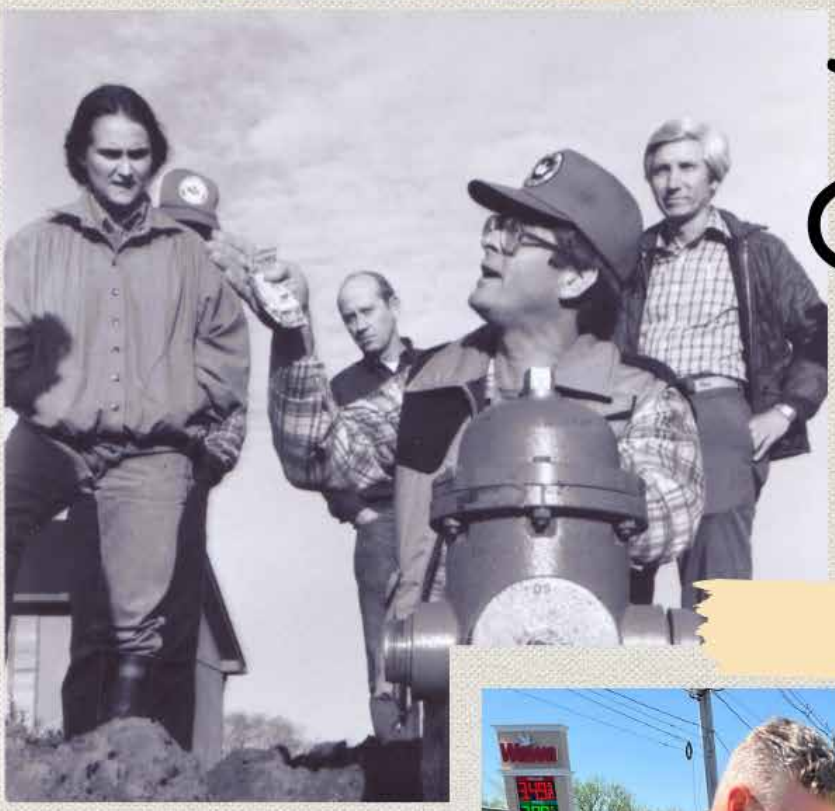
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IRWA ILLINOIS RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

Shoring Holes for Water Main Breaks

by Rodney Phillips, Energy Efficiency Technician

As winter season moves towards us, we have to be concerned about something operators would rather not think about. Water main breaks are among the most urgent problems faced by municipal water departments. A successful repair requires more than locating the damaged pipe and replacing or clamping the broken section. Operators must dig a work area that has enough room to safely access the water main while protecting workers from a potential trench collapse.

Why Shoring is Necessary

Excavating around a water main can create unstable soil conditions. A properly designed shoring system helps prevent the walls from collapsing and provides a workspace where employees can safely expose the pipe and cut out or put on a clamp to make the proper repair.

Shoring should never be treated as an afterthought. The proactive method should be considered before digging takes place and the depth, soil conditions, groundwater and existing utilities all should be considered in the planning. The hole should be large enough to provide adequate room to work in, increasing the size is not always the safest thing to do it can create additional risks like unstable soil, adjacent utilities and nearby structures to come into play.

Choosing a Shoring System

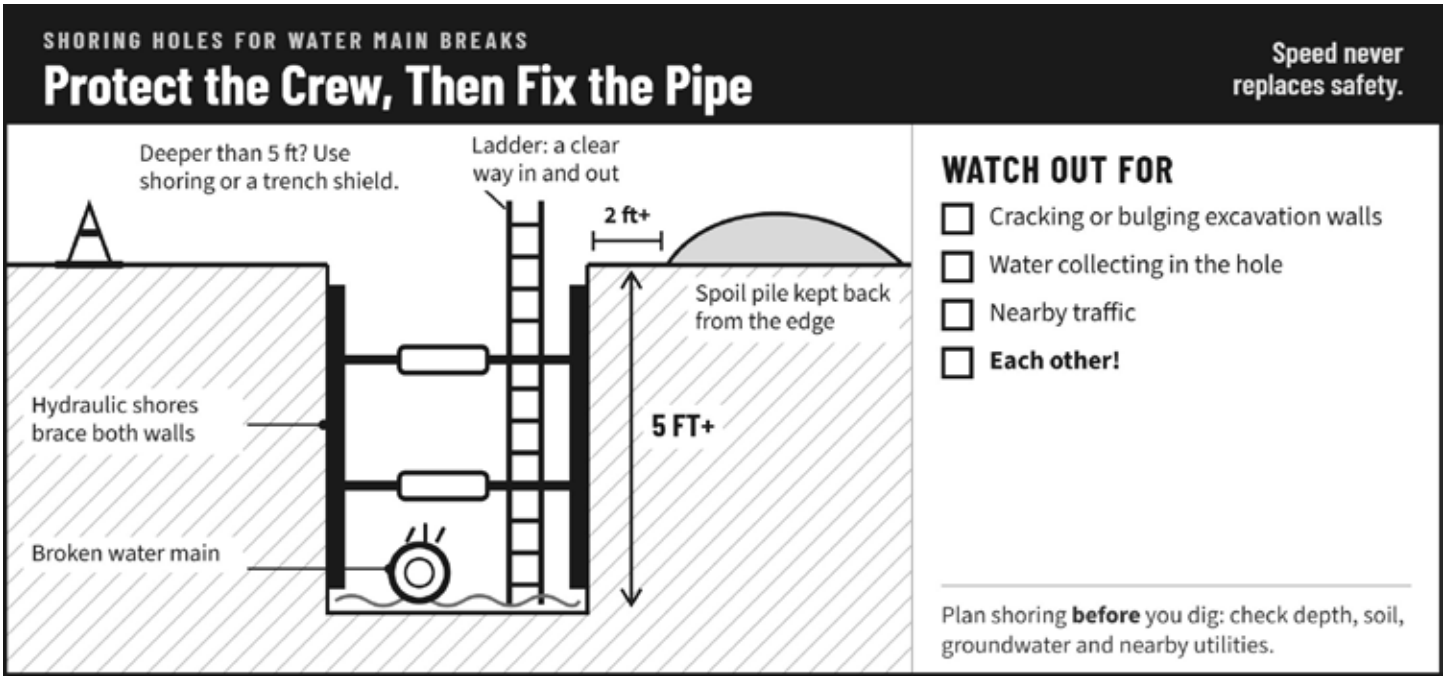
The appropriate shoring method depends on the excavation and site conditions. If the dig is over five feet deep the more common methods are hydraulic or pneumatic shoring or aluminum trench shields since they can be adjusted as the dig progresses. A trench shield or trench box, as it's sometimes called, is primarily designed to protect workers from the surrounding soil collapsing while shoring devices are designed to support the walls.



Workers need a safe way to enter and leave the excavation, ladders and ramps should be positioned so workers don't have to climb over too many obstacles. The access point should remain usable as things change during the repair

Safety Always Comes First

Emergency water main repairs can create pressure to restore service quickly, but speed should never replace safety. Main breaks can be repaired in a relatively short time but recovering from an excavation collapse can have permanent consequences. The goal is not simply to dig a hole big enough to fix the pipe it's to create a controlled and protected work area that allows the crew to do its job safely! If emergency conditions do arise the safest approach is to resist the temptation to take shortcuts. Stay safe out there this upcoming winter season and watch out for cracking or bulging of excavation walls, water accumulation, nearby traffic and especially each other!



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Our Water Systems Are Worth Protecting

by Casey Johnson, IRWA Board Member

I've spent a lot of years around water systems, and the longer I'm in this business, the more convinced I become of one thing: we need to do everything we can to protect our locally owned rural water systems. I'm not against private utilities, I'm not against competition, and I'm certainly not saying every public water system is perfect. What I am saying is that we need to think very carefully before we sell a public water supply to a for-profit utility, because once we do, we may never get it back.

Sometimes I think we forget what we're actually talking about when we talk about selling a water system. We're not selling an old building or a piece of equipment. We're selling something that every person in that community depends on every single day. We're talking about wells, treatment plants, storage tanks, water mains, pumps, meters and, most importantly, the ability to provide safe drinking water to our communities. That is a pretty important responsibility, and I don't think we should look at the decision to sell simply as a financial transaction.

If a private company comes to a community and offers millions of dollars for its water system, it's easy to understand why people would be interested. A lot of rural systems have significant capital needs. We've all seen aging water mains, equipment that needs replaced and capital improvement plans that seem to get more expensive every year. So when someone puts a big check in front of a community, it can be tempting. But I think we need to ask a different question: What are we giving up in exchange for that check? That water system may continue producing revenue for the community for the next 30, 50 or even 100 years. The money from the sale gets spent once. The water system keeps serving customers. That's a pretty important distinction.





One of the things I value most about public water is local control. When a water system is locally owned, the people making the decisions are accountable to the people who live there. If there's a problem, customers know who to call. If there's a major project, the community can have a voice. If rates need to change, there's a local governing body responsible for making that decision. Once ownership leaves the community, that relationship changes.

I also think sometimes rural water operators don't get enough credit for what they do. We're expected to provide water 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Nobody thinks about the water system when everything is working, but the minute something goes wrong, we're expected to fix it. We work holidays, we work nights, we respond to water main breaks, we deal with wells going down, treatment problems, regulatory requirements and customers who need answers. We do it because we understand how important our job is. That's something I'm proud of, and I think we should be proud of the fact that rural communities have built and operated their own water systems for generations.

One of the biggest mistakes we can make is looking at a water system strictly as an asset on a balance sheet. The most valuable part of a water system may not be the pipes or the treatment plant. It may be the people. A good operator knows a system inside and out. They know their wells, their pressures, their customers and their problem areas. They know what equipment has been giving them trouble and what needs attention. You can't put all of that knowledge into a spreadsheet. It comes from years of experience. That's why I believe one of the best investments we can make is investing in our operators.

What are you looking for? - The ABC's of ilrwa.org

Advertising in Water Ways information (Ad agreement and links) - Publications > Advertising Information

Apprenticeship—Resources > Apprenticeship

Becoming a Certified Water/Wastewater Operator—Resources > Becoming a Certified Operator in Illinois

Boil Order Notice—Resources > Downloads

CCR—Services > CCR's

Certification Overview from IRWA—Training > Certification

Certified Water/Wastewater Operator Contract—Resources > Downloads

CEU Forms from webinars or conferences—Training > CEU Form Archives

Compliance Assistance—Services > Compliance Assistance

Cross Connection (manual, survey & ordinance) - Resources > Cross Connection

Current hot topics and upcoming events - Home

Energy Efficiency Assessment—Services > Energy Efficiency

ERP/Contingency Plans—Resources > Emergency Preparedness Planning

For Sale/Wanted—Resources > Classifieds (to submit something—e-mail Heather: ilrwahm@ilrwa.org)

Forming a new water district—Resources > Downloads

GPS/GIS—Services > GPS/GIS Mapping

Industry Organizations—Resources > Links

Job Board—Resources > Job Board

Lead Information —Resources > Lead Information

Leak checklist and how much am I losing flyers—Resources > Downloads

Legislative Information – (Who is my rep?, Bills that IRWA is following)—Resources > Legislative

Mutual Aid—Resources > Downloads

Nitrification Action Plan Information—Resources > Nitrification Act

NFP Tax Forms — Resources > Downloads

NRWA Fleet - Membership > Benefits—click on the NRWA logo

Operator Groups—Resources > Links

PFAS—Home > Hot Topics

Rate Study— Services > Rate Study

Red Flag Act—Resources > Downloads

Speaker Request Form for Conference —Training > Conferences

Tracer Wire Specs—Resources > Downloads

Video Inspection Services—Services > Video Inspection

Water Loss Handouts—Resources > Downloads



Annual Technical Conference



IRWA
ILLINOIS RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

February 16-18, 2027

The agenda for IRWA's 45th Annual Technical Conference is being put together now! The conference will be held February 16-18, 2027 at the Keller Convention Center In Effingham, IL. Exhibitor information should be available in mid-November with the attendee agendas being out a few weeks after that. Watch the IRWA website, social media pages, and your e-mails for further announcements. We look forward to seeing you this year!

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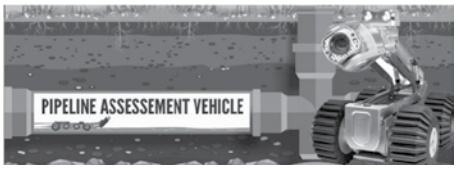
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Larger projects requiring more time and inspection coverage, will be based on the set minimum maintenance fee up to 500 feet. Then a maintenance per foot charge of $1.00, will be assessed for footage above the minimum allowance. IRWA member utilities receive an automatic discount on the “per foot” charge, as well as the reduced set minimum maintenance fee, for each of these types of projects. Non-IRWA member systems will pay the increased set minimum maintenance fee of $750, plus a charge of $1.50 per foot, above the initial 500 feet allowed in the minimum.

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