Talking Points for Water Is Life, and Infrastructure Makes It Happen™ Communications

(NOTE: These talking points are provided as a resource for individuals who may give a presentation – or write a letter to the editor, submit a newsletter article or speak to a reporter – as part of the WATER IS LIFE communications campaign about water and infrastructure issues. Select the points you want to use and add local examples whenever possible. Sources of facts and estimates are cited.)

Introduction/Overview

- [**OPTIONAL**] Thank you for the kind introduction. My name is [**fill in**] and I work at [**fill in**].
- I'm here today to talk about the importance of something we often take for granted – the systems that provide our community with abundant, safe drinking water and environmentally safe wastewater treatment.
- Here in [**community**] and in many cities across the nation, these systems are in need of repair, expansion or improvement if we are to meet 21st Century water needs.

Water and Its Importance to Our Community

- It's easy to take water for granted – it covers 70 percent of the Earth's surface, yet accessible fresh water makes up less than one percent of the world's total supply.[1]
- Water is important to us and all Americans for several reasons: public health, economy, and the environment.
- Of course, clean and safe water is crucial for human health. Since the development of public water systems – including both fresh water and wastewater treatment facilities – around the turn of the last century, we've seen a significant decline in water-related death and illness, a stunning increase in longevity and an improvement in public health.
    - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) credits treatment of drinking water in the United States since 1900 for the virtual elimination of waterborne diseases such as typhoid, cholera and hepatitis A and for helping to increase average life expectancy by nearly 30 years.[2]
    - Sadly, we are often reminded of the health benefits during the rare occasions when water systems fail – as in Milwaukee in 1993, when cryptosporidium entered the water supply, sickened 400,000 people and led to more than 50 deaths.[3]
- Water is also crucial for our economy and the creation of new jobs. Imagine the difficulties in obtaining approval for a new factory, school or retail space unless there was both an adequate supply of water and a sufficient capacity to treat wastewater.

    - Water is used in dozens of processes including: fabrication, processing, washing and cooling in industries as varied as power generation, steel, mining, manufacturing and high technology.
    - Clean water also supports a $50 billion per year recreation industry, $300 billion a year in coastal tourism, $45 billion per year in commercial seafood and fishing and all of U.S. agriculture.[4]
    - Here in [**community**] water resources helped fuel growth in [**name local developments, or industries**].
- Finally, water and our ability to treat it are crucial for protecting the environment including wetlands, farms, wildlife habitat and natural bodies of water.
    - Wastewater treatment plants prevent millions of tons of pollutants from reaching America's rivers, streams, lakes and coastlines.
    - That's why we strongly support both the SAFE DRINKING WATER ACT that sets standards for drinking water safety and the CLEAN WATER ACT that protects our streams and groundwater by requiring pollution controls and wastewater treatment.

Clean Water and Wastewater Systems Are Keys to Americans' Quality of Life

- As we've seen, water is essential to America's quality of life, that is, our health, economy and environment.
- And our clean water and wastewater treatment systems are essential to provide the water and water treatment Americans need every day.
- America and [**your community**] depend on two types of water systems.
    - The first treats our fresh water supplies, making water safe to drink.
    - Most water systems are small -- 85 percent of the systems serve populations of under 4,000, but the majority of Americans are served by municipal systems in our nation's larger cities.[5]
    - Overall, we provide [**XXX**] million gallons of clean water every day in the U.S.
    - Here in [**community**], we provide [**YYY**] gallons daily from our plants at [**locations**].
- Once we use water in our homes and businesses, our nation's more than 16,000 wastewater treatment systems make our used water safe to return to nature.[6]
    - Nationally, we treat [**XXX**] million gallons of wastewater daily.
    - Here in [**community**] we treat [**YYY**] gallons daily at our plants in [**locations**].
- Infrastructure also includes natural solutions to managing and cleaning stormwater such as constructed wetlands and retention ponds where plants and soil filter pollutants from street and building runoff. These 'green' infrastructure systems can be overburdened as well and many need to be improved and expanded.

- In addition to sources of water and treatment facilities, America's water systems include 800,000 of miles of water pipe and 600,000 miles of sewer line – all part of our nation's water infrastructure.[7]
- Imagine if our water systems failed – we'd risk our supply of drinking water, and jeopardize our community's health, economy and environment. That's why our water systems and infrastructure are so important.

The Challenges Our Water Systems Face Today

- Today, our water and waste water systems are severely challenged by aging and deteriorating pipes and facilities, ever-increasing demand, and tighter budgets.
- The vast majority of the nation's pipe network was installed after World War II, and is now reaching the end of its useful life and must be replaced.[8]
    - The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) cites a rule of thumb that sewer lines have a useful life of 50 years (although lifetimes can be significantly longer, depending on maintenance and local conditions.)[9] So the clock is ticking.
    - CBO estimates many rural and urban systems lose 20 percent or more of the water they produce through leaks in their pipes.[10]
    - The General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that one-third of the nation's large water systems had 20 percent of their pipeline nearing replacement age, and for one-tenth of the large systems, fully 50 percent of their pipe was at or near replacement age.[11]
    - By 2030, the average [**drinking water**] utility will have to spend about three and a half times as much on pipe replacement due to wear out than it does today….will also spend three times as much on repairs in that year as it spends today, as pipes get older and more prone to breakage.[12]
- In [**community**] [**XX**] percent of our pipe and sewer lines are at the replacement stage.
- Many of the nation's water and wastewater treatment plants, some built in the early 1900s, are now reaching the end of their expected lives and also have to be replaced.[13]
- In addition, CBO estimates that facilities built to meet the requirements of the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Acts passed in the 1970s will have to be replaced in the next two decades.[14]
    - Here in [**community**] our water and wastewater plants at [**locations**] will require replacement or significant upgrade by the year [**20XX**].
- This means drinking water and wastewater utilities need to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in their capital infrastructure over the next twenty years, according to EPA, the CBO, and the Water Infrastructure Network, a consortium of industry, municipal and nonprofit associations:
    - Projected needs range from $485 billion to nearly $1.2 trillion.[15]

- CBO estimates that for the years 2000 to 2019, *annual costs* for infrastructure investment will average between $11.6 billion and $20.1 billion for drinking water systems and between $13.0 billion and $20.9 billion for wastewater systems.[16]
- The reality is that there is a growing gap between revenue utilities receive from local ratepayers and taxes and long-term investment needs.[17] We must invest in innovative solutions with new technologies to rebuild and expand these deteriorating water and wastewater systems to meet the needs of our communities both today and in the future.
- These investments are long-term and expensive, so meeting the challenges ahead requires a new partnership in which utilities, governments, citizens, businesses and community organizations all have important roles.

Conclusion

- EPA emphasizes "Four Pillars of Sustainable Infrastructure:" better management; full-cost pricing; efficient water use; and watershed approaches to protection.[18]
- We must all understand the scope of the issues and that failing to maintain and improve our water systems poses risks for public health, the economy and the environment.
- As citizens, we must encourage and support local, state and federal leaders who address our water system needs and are willing to look for solutions.
- We cannot remain complacent – there's too much at stake.
- Thank you, and I will be delighted to answer any questions.

End Notes

1 General Accounting Office, Freshwater Supply: States' View of How Federal Agencies Could Help Them Meet the Challenges of Expected Shortages (July 2003), p. 12.
http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03514.pdf

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Achievements in Public Health, 1900-1999: Control of Infectious Diseases." *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.* July 30, 1999.
http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4829a1.htm

3 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. 8.
http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

4 Water Infrastructure Network, Water Infrastructure Now: Recommendations for Clean and Safe Water in the 21st Century (April 2000), p. 1.
http://www.win-water.org/win_reports/pub2/winow.pdf

5 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. 3.
http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

6 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. 1.
http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

7 General Accounting Office, Water Infrastructure: Comprehensive Asset Management Has Potential to Help Utilities Better Identify Needs and Plan Future Investments (March 2004), p. 14. http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04461.pdf

8Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Water and Drinking Water Infrastructure GAP Analysis Report (September 2002), p. 14. http://www.epa.gov/owm/gapreport.pdf

9 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. 8. http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

10 Ibid.

11 General Accounting Office, Water Infrastructure: Comprehensive Asset Management Has Potential to Help Utilities Better Identify Needs and Plan Future Investments (March 2004), p. 15. http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04461.pdf

12 American Water Works Association, Dawn of the Replacement Era: Reinvesting in Drinking Water Infrastructure (May 2001), p. 6. http://www.google.com/url?sa=U&start=1&q=http://www.winwater.org/win_reports/infrastructure.pdf&e=42

13 American Society of Civil Engineers, Report Card for America's Infrastructure: 2003 Progress Report/An Update to the 2001 Report Card (2003), p. 3. http://www.asce.org/reportcard/index.cfm?reaction=full&page=6

14 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. 9. http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

15 General Accounting Office, Water Infrastructure: Comprehensive Asset Management Has Potential to Help Utilities Better Identify Needs and Plan Future Investments (March 2004), p. 13. http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04461.pdf

16 Congressional Budget Office, Future Investment in Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (November 2002), p. ix. http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=3983&sequence=0

17 Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Water and Drinking Water Infrastructure GAP Analysis Report (September 2002), Executive Summary. http://www.epa.gov/owm/gapreport.pdf

18 Environmental Protection Agency Web site, "Sustainable Water Infrastructure for the 21st Century." http://www.epa.gov/water/infrastructure/