

Each issue, we ask members of the *On Tap* Editorial Advisory Board to answer a drinking water-related question. We then print as many responses as space permits. The opinions expressed are not necessarily those of NESCA.



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Imagine No Water

To help customers realize the value of their water, you must first catch their attention and make them take the time to think about how pure water, delivered to their house makes their life possible. One way is to ask them to picture living without their water service for one week. For one day, it is possible to get by without water: Simply fill the tub before the water is cut off. You can even use the water in the toilet tank if you do not use it for the only flush you get that day.

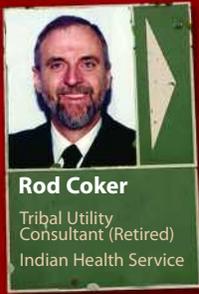
But, a week without water is another thing altogether. First, there is no flush toilet. It means going back to the good old outhouse, or taking a trip to where someone has water service. Imagine not being able to get up and wash your face, brush your teeth, or use the toilet until you have hauled water from somewhere else. Showers would be impossible, tub baths would be possible, but it takes a lot of buckets of water being carried in to fill the tub.

How about hot water? Without water service, hot water heaters will not function. That means that all hot water will have to be heated on the stove. How much water are you going to have to heat for that tub bath? And, where is it you are getting all this water: Do you have a well or do you have to bring it from the river or creek?

Our modern life would be impossible without water service. At times it may seem that it is expensive, but give it a true comparison with other utilities. You can live without phones, cable TV, and Internet access, but look at what you pay for those conveniences. You cannot live without electricity, water, and wastewater services. Again, compare what you pay for water with what you pay for elec-

tricity. If your customers really sit down and look at what water service has given to our lives, then they may begin to realize the value of their water.





No Substitute for Water

The availability of safe drinking water in developed countries is usually taken for granted while in developing countries, this same necessity is recognized as an extremely valuable resource. Why is this? Maybe individuals in developing countries recognize the relationship between water and quality of life. While those of us in developed countries already experience a quality of life that allows us to just assume that safe drinking water will always be there. How can we open people's eyes?

The concept of "renewable resources" is popular these days and is promoted everywhere you look. What if we pointed out that everything is renewable or replaceable, except for water? All of our resources either reoccur when used or a substitute can be used. But, there is no substitute for water.

When the world was created, there was a specific amount of water included in that process. It never changes. It never goes away. When you look at the hydrologic cycle, you see the recycling of this resource. Actually, this is probably the greatest example of recycling that exists, as it involves a global effort. And it is ongoing in spite of or in the absence of our involvement.

Our actions can either make this natural and ongoing process easier or more difficult, impacting the usability of this resource. If we, as a society, can get our mind around this concept, then we can start to understand how valuable this resource really is. Then, maybe we'll do all we can to take care of it.

Tell a Story

The value of water is (or will be) very apparent to customers as they receive ever-increasing water bills. While you have their attention, take the opportunity to educate them about the water system and how it is a valuable service to them and to the community. Do it without a bunch of fluff, just the facts. Here are some topics to consider:

Brief System History?

Give customers a brief system history. What was the community like before the system was built? Why was the system built? What did it cost? What were the initial specifications and what improvements have been made to date?

Current System Services and Benefits?

Describe the main services and benefits you provide for the customer. Show that you are meeting Safe Drinking Water Act requirements. How are the technical, managerial, and financial needs of the system met? How much does running a good system cost? What value does this provide for the customer and for the community today and in the short-term?

Projected Future System Services and Benefits?

Describe how the water system will meet the needs of the community in the future. Show customers projections for growth (or shrinkage) of services and benefits. What are the long-term plans for system operation, maintenance, and repairs? Let customers know well in advance what improvements are planned, what those improvements will do for them, and how much they will cost.

Build a solid relationship with your customers by keeping them informed, and they will better understand the value of water and how their money is being used.

