

and a press release lifting the boil water advisory was issued. The media was again sent copies of the press release. The press release was hand delivered to all of our customers because the initial faxed notification was not picked up by all the newsrooms and did not reach as many residents as the MUA had anticipated. A quicker response time may have taken place if the media had published the contact information.

Lesson Learned: The utility should have had better communication means with the news media such as obtaining the names of the reporters working on the story and having the direct phone numbers for the editors and reporters. It also would have been better to notify the public as far in advance as possible of a potential water advisory issue rather than waiting until the sample results were received.

Relationships: The Customer

Receiving no news does not necessarily mean good news. Perhaps you are not receiving complaints because a customer does not want to get involved, does not have the time to make phone calls, or does not know who to call at the authority. Or maybe a customer is satisfied with the service, but did not know who to contact to report the good news. A survey provides the customer with a connection to the authority and lets them know that the authority is concerned about the quality of service and its community.

A good way to gauge how the public perceives your authority is to send a follow-up letter survey after a service call. Giving the public a chance to report on authority service can help determine the authority's weaknesses and strengths. This can be a useful tool in determining the public perception of the authority. This may also allow the authority to nip future problems in the bud.

Dennis Palmer, Executive Director of Landis Sewerage Authority, provides the following survey example:

After every phone call the LSA receives with respect to sewer blockages, slow draining sewer line, sewer odors, gurgling pipes (yes, we get calls about noisy sewer drains), a letter is sent out to the customer stating that the LSA strives to improve customer service. In response to problems the LSA asks the customer to help the LSA improve its service. The letter includes the following questions with space for answers:

1. Was your call handled professionally and courteously?
2. Was a truck and road crew dispatched to your location and was the time frame reasonable for the hour of the day or the day of the week?
3. Did the road crew visit you to discuss what they found to be the problem?
4. Would you like a follow-up call from an authority customer service representative? If yes, please provide a name and phone number so we call you.
5. Additional comments and suggestions.

The number of letters and the number of responses returned become part of the quarterly report sent to Mayor and Council. Copies of actual response letters, with comments, are also included.

Relationships: Get involved within your community

A fun way to get involved within the authority's service area communities is to attend community fairs. Directly interacting with the customers is a great ice breaker. If a customer has concerns or positive feedback, this is an opportunity to hear about it. This interaction will give a "face" to the authority. It is a way to show the public that not only is the authority a part of the community that it serves but it is also a concerned member of the community. It is also a tool for getting a public message out. If the authority is starting a new program, this would be the best place to directly inform the public.

It is a good idea to train customer service employees who can answer public questions for these events. Perhaps the authority will be able to solve customer problems on the spot or at the very least, be able to call the correct person at the authority. Use the employee training session to update the entire staff on the specific responsibilities that individuals have been assigned.

There are many community fairs to attend, ranging from Earth Day fairs to town pride street fairs.

Pam Carolan, Executive Director of the Mount Laurel Township MUA, shares her experiences:

Keeping the public informed and trying to shed the "Ed Norton" image is a priority for us. The Mount Laurel Township sponsors an annual fall festival. Attendance is estimated at 15,000, which is substantial for a community of only 40,000. The fall festival is an opportunity to creatively shed a positive light on the MUA and allow our customers the chance to associate faces with the authority. At the festival, the MUA playfully makes the point of highlighting the benefits of modern advances to provide clean water to the public. To name just a few, the MUA compared 19th century plumbing to modern plumbing by using an Old West-themed event; described the daily water use and waste disposal methods of animals as compared to humans by using a Circus Big Top theme; and showed a light hearted watershed movie complete with popcorn to promote the Hollywood-themed event.

The MUA directly reaches out to educate the local teachers and school children. The MUA participates at the annual county Earth Fair. Every summer the MUA hosts one day of a week-long teachers' workshop regarding environmental issues called "Educate the Educator". The MUA also holds contests with school children to design the artwork for our two elevated water tanks with the finalists receiving US savings bonds.

Additionally, MUA employees coordinate and participate in local community service projects. The most successful of which

has been an annual two-day program with 130 eighth graders. The students spend one day learning about the MUA via exhibits and with a tour of our wastewater treatment facility. The second day is spent installing "No Dumping, Drains to Stream" placards on storm drains within the community.

Leonard Kaiser, Executive Director of Bergen County Utilities Authority, shares his community outreach efforts:

The "Can the Grease" program was developed to educate the public on the proper disposal of household grease. Ordinary cooking grease has been identified as one of the leading causes of dry weather overflows and backups causing health hazards and threatening the environment. In addition, improper disposal of household grease causes an increase in operation and maintenance costs for the BCUA and the local Department of Public Works resulting in higher sewer bills for customers.

Too often grease is left behind after cooking meals and is washed into the plumbing system. Grease sticks to the inside of the sewer pipes and over time it can build up and block the entire pipe. The easiest way to solve this problem is to keep grease out of the sewer system in the first place and the grease can provides residents with an easy and safe disposal method of household grease.

The can is a two pound, brushed chrome container with a slip cover suitable for storage on counter tops or stovetops. Over two thousand cans have been distributed to municipal departments of public works, condominium associations and private citizens. Cans have also been distributed to area residents free-of-charge at environmental events such as Hackensack River Day, Hooked on the Hudson and River Fest.

The success of the program has far exceeded the original goals. The program has saved tax money by helping eliminate the cost of cleaning grease out of sewer lines and costly overflows. Municipal governments have reported fewer sewer overflows, and, therefore, lower costs from overtime and emergency calls. The BCUA benefits with lower amounts of grease flowing into and clogging the treatment works, and through the good will created by distributing the grease cans at no charge to local area residents.

Dennis Palmer, Executive Director of Landis Sewerage Authority, adds these examples of what he does at the authority:

Two things: be involved and be out there. Today, it is a must for the authorities to be involved with their communities. At LSA we have staff active in the local Chamber of Commerce, including going on the State Chamber's "Walk to Washington", as well as the local Rotary Club. Our staff participates in several career days at different high schools, as well as the County Improvement Authority's environmental fair. LSA hosts tours for students from Rowan University, Cumberland County College and several local area high schools. LSA employees have been asked to serve as judges for middle school science fairs. The

authority also works with the County 4-H Program and for the last five years the program brings about eighty fifth through seventh graders to the plant for a tour as part of their Environmental Ambassadors Program. LSA also runs an Earth Day Poster Contest for several middle schools to raise environmental awareness and the winner from each school receives a US savings bond presented at a board meeting with the commissioners. A press release, with a photo of the students holding their winning poster, is sent to the local newspapers.

Relationships: Elected Local Officials

Communicating with local elected officials is essential. For the long-term, communicating how important the authority is to the community and highlighting the many services the authority provides to the community will help establish roots. It is important for local elected officials to know the good job the authority is doing to keep the water clean, to effectively remove waste, and to handle emergencies at all times and days of the week. Elected officials need to know the strengths and positives so that they, too, can speak confidently about the authority. Why fix it if it ain't broke?

Other benefits of keeping local elected officials in-the-know will help prevent the appearance of secrecy and in case the authority needs to contact them during an emergency the authority will know who and how to contact them. Local elected officials may also be able to lobby on behalf of the authority for potential public funds.

Some ways to keep the lines of communication open and consistent include:

- ❖ Sending quarterly reports to the Mayor and the President of the City/Town Council. These reports should include authority performance information and resident responses from follow-up service call surveys.
- ❖ Invite officials to award ceremonies and significant events.
- ❖ Provide officials with tours of the authority.
- ❖ Attend bids/contracts/public hearings.

We hope these examples have been helpful to you.

AEA is a nonprofit association of publicly owned facilities providing environmental services to the people of the State of New Jersey. The mission of AEA is to assist its members – who treat wastewater, handle solid waste, and supply the public with clean water – to pursue their common goals of protecting and enhancing public health and the natural environment.

Why New Jersey Should Preserve Authority Ownership!



This guide highlights the significant difference between public and private ownership of local water, wastewater and solid authorities and describes proactive strategies that authorities are using to provide excellent customer service.

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Why New Jersey Should Preserve Authority Ownership!

There is an established New Jersey trend of sharing local governmental services. For instance, in 2007 Governor Corzine signed several new laws removing legal obstacles to sharing services and merging personnel. Authorities are already performing shared services among communities which can be expanded even further. Since this fact is not well known, authorities need to carefully review how their services are delivered and be able to communicate these benefits to the public at-large, local elected and municipal officials and to members of the press.

The paragraphs that follow provide guidance to authorities as to how to put their best foot forward and to present their own personal authority strengths and benefits to the public.

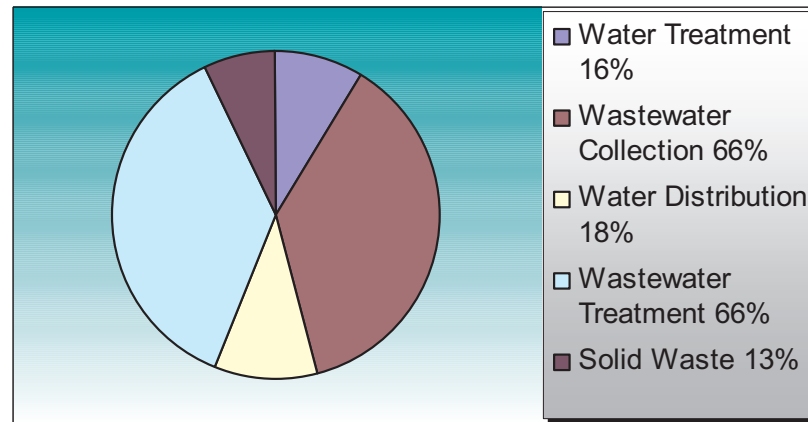
AEA would like to thank the following for their assistance in developing this guide:

Pamela Carolan, Mt. Laurel Township Municipal Utilities Authority
Franklin Hartman, Bordentown Sewerage Authority
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Rocco Maiellano, Evesham Municipal Utilities Authority
Dennis Palmer, Landis Sewerage Authority
Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association

Who Are We?

The Association of Environmental Authorities is comprised of 108 authorities, and municipally owned facilities, and approximately 100 associate and affiliate members.

2007 Members



I. Make your case! Know your Authority.

Spreading the message about the many benefits that a public authority offers its community-at-large starts by doing some homework. It is critical that Executive Directors and public relations staff understand the authority's financials and be able to effectively communicate the services and benefits to the community at-large. Cost savings and operational efficiencies are strong arguments for authority governance. The public needs to know the benefits of the services that the authority provides and what these services would cost under a privately owned company. Let the figures speak for themselves (*with some helpful presentation*).

Benefits of Public Authorities

Create your own list, but here are some good examples of the benefits offered to the public:

- ❖ The public authority is there for the public at-large and available twenty-four hours, seven days a week.
- ❖ There is no service charge to fix water-and sewer-related problems.
- ❖ The Authority Board consists of members of the local community, not strangers living thousands of miles away or in another country.
- ❖ Public employees cannot strike and thereby jeopardize the delivery of services.

- ❖ Services are more secure and consistent with low employee turnover.
- ❖ Employees live in the local area and often drink the same water and use the same services. They have a vested interest in good service.
- ❖ Customer service is local. Customers are calling local employees with information or complaints.
- ❖ The plant is operated by certified DEP locally licensed operators who have continuing educational training.
- ❖ The authority has been here for years within the community. A private company can change hands frequently and non-stop.
- ❖ Authorities will support other community services such as the fire department during local emergencies. Authorities have informal agreements of mutual aid within the community and with other local authorities to lend support during emergencies and non-emergencies. Private companies will charge for emergency services and for the time of their personnel.
- ❖ The authority is ready, willing and able to share services, equipment, and licensed or skilled personnel.
- ❖ The authority constantly plans for safety, replenishment and replacement of the infrastructure and budgets for it.
- ❖ The authority uses reserve funds to undertake capital projects and avoid rate shocks.

Know your competition!

Knowing the authority is not enough. Executive Directors must know the competition. Research and compare the authority's rates with the private company's rates to strengthen the argument that services should continue as a publicly owned entity. Learn about privatization failures and quote actual case studies.

Dennis Palmer, Executive Director of Landis Sewerage Authority, shares an example regarding contract operations:

In addition to running an 8.2 MGD Advanced Treatment facility, the LSA also owns and operates a 400-acre farm and approximately 200 acres of woodlands for land application of biosolids. From 1989 to the end of 2004, the authority utilized contract operations for the biosolids application and management. The contractor provided overall management, land application expertise, permit administration and compliance as well as labor. When the LSA new facilities came on line in 1989 it did not have the manpower or knowledge to run and operate the agriculture operation. The contractor had two full-time managers and hired 3 or 4 seasonal employees that were laid off during the winter. The LSA after evaluating the skills set and knowledge gained over the 15 years decided to cease contract operations and hire the staff as LSA employees; thus eliminating the contractor's profit, overhead and other contractor-related costs. Without question the contractor's staff and knowledge were needed in the start-up years, but now after running the numbers, the LSA expects to save \$40,000+ per year.

II. Relate, Communicate, Educate

Creating and maintaining business relationships within the community will help you to spread the message about the benefits of MUAs.

Relationships: The Press

Control the authority's message by generating press releases. Have them readily available when the press requests a statement. Create authority press releases for stories to send to local newspapers; especially news about the authority's projects that benefit the community or solve a problem. Remember to update the authority overview items in the AEA Commissioners' Handbook. Those items can be used in the authority press packet. It is helpful to create a list of daily and weekly newspapers so that this information can be disseminated quickly.

When speaking with reporters, choose a point of contact within the authority and have that person be the only one speaking to the press. That person should be prepared with information, offer quick quotes- another reason to know the authority- but always proceed with caution as words cannot be retracted.

Become friendly with reporters as it will be easier to disseminate important information. Most likely authority information will be technical in nature, so be prepared to define terms and technology. Be polite and get back to them if you need to research background information regarding the story. It would also be helpful to be accommodating and ask about the reporter's deadline and give them the information prior to that date or time. If there is an important story, offer an exclusive to a receptive reporter.

Strengths of MUAs

- ❖ No foreign investment
- ❖ Local ownership and control- our employees live in the community!
- ❖ Low rates, non-profit driven
- ❖ Tax-exempt financing, tie in with low rates
- ❖ PUC exemption
- ❖ Non-franchise territories, no service area limitations
- ❖ Non-stockholder driven, more responsive and timely
- ❖ Tapping fees used as alternative source of revenue
- ❖ Appointed as opposed to elected board
- ❖ Less risk, less long-term investment interest
- ❖ Capital funds invested back into business/services/facilities
- ❖ Representation and responsible member of the community

During emergencies, it is extremely important to inform the public immediately. Do not wait to disseminate information or talk to reporters. Also, make accommodations to reporters during emergencies.

Finally, remember that reporters never write the headline; it is the editor's responsibility. If an article that quotes authority personnel has a sensational headline, do not get upset at the reporter.

Press definitions:

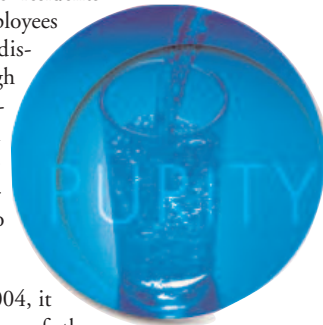
On the record: All information can be used in the article and be attributed to the person who said it.

Off the record: Information is not used in the article.

Background: Information is used in the article but not attributed to the person who said it.

Rocco Maiellano, Executive Director of the Evesham Municipal Utilities Authorities, shares a case study regarding press relationships:

On July 12, 2004, Burlington County experienced what is known as a "thousand year storm". The storm event caused water damage to many of the water and wastewater facilities in Burlington County. The Supervisory on-call phone system was inundated with calls concerning sewer overflows and water backing into residents' homes. The MUA employees were immediately dispatched to control high flows entering the treatment facilities and did everything possible to respond to the emergency by reporting to the facilities.



On Tuesday, July 13, 2004, it was confirmed that one of the nine potable wells had been flooded and there was a possibility that some surface water may have entered the well. As a result, the well was shut down immediately and one sample tested positive for fecal coliform and e-coli. The NJDEP and the Burlington County Health Department were contacted and the public notification process began. Once the press release imposing the boil water advisory was approved by the NJDEP, it was sent to seven TV and radio stations, four newspapers, the Fire Department, Police Department, the Township, the School District, the Township website, the Burlington County Health Department and the Burlington County Department of Emergency Management. In addition, it was hand delivered to hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers and restaurants.

On Thursday, July 15, 2004, the eleven samples taken on July 14, 2004 all came back negative. The NJDEP was informed