



Why You—and Your Customers—Need AWWA

The other day I got a call from an old friend who also happens to be a water industry professional. Not surprisingly, he was calling to talk about AWWA in general, and, as I soon found out, to make some shocking observations in particular. We exchanged pleasantries and soon found our conversation homing in on the fact that the number of memberships in AWWA has been dropping. His simple remark of “I can tell” caught me off guard.

My friend is a busy consultant who advises water utilities of all sizes throughout North America. Even though he’s really smart, I was perplexed as to how he could tell that AWWA’s membership numbers are dropping. What he said next, although alarming, casts a new light on the value of an AWWA membership—and shows us who ultimately bears the risk if that membership is dropped.

My friend explained that more and more of his clients are faced with complicated budget challenges and that those who elect to eliminate membership expenses often justify that decision with the false assumption that it won’t harm their customers.

“But,” he said, “it only takes two years.”

“Two years for what?” I asked.

“Two years for a utility’s customers to begin to suffer because the utility is out of touch with the industry,” he replied.

He then went on to explain that his clients who have stayed involved in AWWA are more aware of and informed about current trends and issues, better networked, and, when they do need assistance, better able to more quickly identify and get in touch with the experts they need. As a result, they are less reliant on him for solutions.

On the other hand, he has observed that among utilities that have dropped their membership in AWWA, within a mere two years, they have become out of touch with what is going on in the industry, and their customers have begun to suffer. The value to a utility’s customers of its employees associating with other water professionals and having access to existing solutions through an association cannot be overstated. Associations come into being because they allow individuals and organizations to accomplish together what they cannot accomplish alone. We not only accomplish more together, we accomplish it more efficiently.

It should not surprise any of us that utilities are closely scrutinizing every cost they incur these days nor that a number of utility programs and expenses such as membership in associations like AWWA are at risk. AWWA, too, is scrutinizing its costs in new ways. Like utilities, our goal is to make sure we continue delivering great value to our members and customers—and through them to their customers.

We know that despite attempts to contain costs, utilities are faced with increasing expenses in many areas of their operations. In response, AWWA has held the line on dues for three years running. Being a member of AWWA in 2011 will cost the same as it did in 2009.

Because utilities often have to reduce their travel budgets, we know that in-person participation at our workshops and conferences will be lower than it has been in previous years—even though the need for training continues to grow as new people enter our profession and as our knowledge advances. To address this need, we have dramatically expanded online learning opportunities so that we can bring the training to you instead of you having to come to it. AWWA webcasts are effective, reasonably priced, and, best of all, require no travel. One of our strongest programs is our advocacy program in Washington, D.C. In addition to regulatory and legislative activities on behalf of the water industry, AWWA has worked tirelessly in Washington for sustainable solutions to water infrastructure needs—most recently and most visibly in advocating for the creation of a federal water infrastructure bank that would provide low-interest loans for large-scale projects.

Without question, the challenges of providing safe drinking water will continue to increase. So now is precisely the wrong time to turn away from AWWA. It’s the time to turn toward AWWA. The important thing isn’t really whether two years is the amount of time it takes for a utility to become out of touch; the important thing is that together we are smarter. Together we are stronger. Most important of all, though, is that with us—together—the public is safer.

If you have any comments or concerns,
please write me at OpenChannel@awwa.org.