AWWA standards: Venerable, vital

AWWA standards, the oldest mainstay of the association, continue to be respected and relevant because of the vital and ongoing participation of volunteers in the consensus process that produces standards that water utilities throughout North America rely on.

Standards committee volunteers “bring an impressive collective expertise and a wide range of experiences to the development process,” said Paul Olson, senior manager of the standards program. Committee volunteers represent producers, users and interested parties with specialization in equipment, chemicals or operations.

Committees follow a proportion of up to one-third producer members and two-thirds general-interest and user members. Part of the text at the beginning of each standard reads, “AWWA standards are intended to represent a consensus of the water supply industry that the product described will provide satisfactory service.”

Olson credits the coming together of “utility end users, designers and engineers, installation contractors, product producers and distributors whose collaboration ensures that the everyday interaction of these groups in the marketplace is efficient and consistent.” The results of these efforts are that “water professionals can focus more of their time and resources on providing safe water for their customers,” he said.

Thanks to dedicated volunteers, the program continues to be an important public service to the water industry and consumers. “Volunteers in the standards program generally see the value that standards bring to the water industry, and are motivated to provide their knowledge and input to enhance that value,” Olson commented.

The need to recruit and retain volunteers for this key service of the association has been a top goal for Standards Council chair Robert Cheng, deputy general manager of operations for the Long Beach (Calif.) Water Department. The council recognizes the importance of young professionals (YPs) to this process, and Cheng and his colleagues have

- created a liaison position from the YP Committee to the council and
- increased outreach to YPs at conferences and through fact sheets and other communications.
“One perception we wish to clear up is that you have to have a defined number of years of experience with the subject of the standard before you can be considered for inclusion into a Standards committee.” Cheng emphasized that this is not true, and that while some knowledge is helpful, “the desire to learn and aid in the standards development process may be more important.”

The consensus process is at the heart of standards program. Cheng notes that a key element in the high regard in which standards are held is the standard-setting process. Committee makeup is designed to reach a balanced viewpoint. The process typically involves years of comments and discussion.

Cheng identified some changes that have been implemented to streamline the lengthy procedural process, another of his goals as chair. These changes include “allowing the Standards Council to maintain its authority in the daily operations of the standards-setting process, instead of the board,” as well as “the examination and adoption of electronic media to facilitate committee discussions” and the use of electronic balloting.

Helping define AWWA’s role in the international water market going forward is also a focus of the Standards Council, according to Cheng. Although inclusion of more international professionals on standards committees would be valuable, Cheng notes that existing rules and policies limit direct engagement of this community in the standard-setting process.

Looking ahead, Cheng said, “The association needs to better define its place in the global water community; in that manner, the standards program can better understand whether we continue to predominantly serve our North American customer base or revise our business strategy to be more inclusive of the world views in the standards.”

Each of AWWA’s 164 standards is updated on average every five years and organized alphanumerically by series:

- A—groundwater and wells
- B—filtration; softening; disinfection chemicals; coagulation; scale and corrosion control; taste and odor control; and fluorides
- C—ductile-iron pipe and fittings; steel pipe; concrete pipe; valves and hydrants; pipe installation; disinfection of facilities; meters; service lines; and plastic pipe
- D—storage
- E—pumps
- F—plant equipment
- G—utility management

The G group, introduced in 2004, is the newest category and included eight standards. The C group has the largest number of standards, and the D group some of the lengthiest standards.

“AWWA has served the members and the water industry by dedicating staff and volunteer resources to this core program and has succeeded in enabling the continued development and expansion of industry standards,” said Olson. The newest standards include B110-09, Membrane
About 30 new or revised standards are published each year. Olson notes that more than 30 standards are currently in development on topics such as membrane processes; ultraviolet (UV) light and ozone treatment systems; pipe rehabilitation methods; storage tanks; and utility management system standards, including conservation and water reclamation programs and wastewater treatment plant operations. Cheng added that the UV treatment standard will provide some much needed basis for specifications.

A standard starts as an idea proposed to the Standards Council, which determines whether to pursue developing a standard. Notice of standards work—for new and revised standards—is published every year online. A new standard may be assigned to an existing committee, or a new committee may be established.

After extensive work by the committee to draft a standard, it is reviewed and balloted by the Standards Council and any questions or no votes resolved. It is then published online for public comment. A standard that passes the public comment stage is then forwarded to the AWWA Board of Directors for final approval. The year of board approval appears as a two-digit extension following the standard designation.

At any review stage, the standard may be revised to ensure precision, accuracy and fairness. AWWA is accredited by the American National Standards Institute, and AWWA standards are endorsed as American National Standards.

AWWA is 130 years old this year. Looking back, Olson said, “AWWA has produced standards for over 100 years and has facilitated the collaboration of the water industry’s best and brightest to provide reliable industry standards.”

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