How Can My Utility Benefit From AWWA Standards?  

**QUESTION:** I know AWWA is well known for its standards, but when should I use them and how can they benefit utility activities?

**ANSWER:** AWWA started developing standards more than 100 years ago and takes great pride in this core program. Representing the collective knowledge of diverse AWWA volunteers, standards have been developed to benefit individual users like you and your utility. The information that goes into a standard has been collected and improved over many years through rigorous review and development. The bottom line for a utility is that by using AWWA Standards you’re obtaining quality products and ensuring system integrity. AWWA Standards contain information that would take a utility many years to assemble, verify, and trust. AWWA Standards do all the work, saving your utility time and money.

**EQUIPMENT PURCHASES**

Standards come in handy for many utility applications, primarily planning, specification, and purchasing activities. Using an AWWA Standard to build a purchase document accomplishes two goals: The purchase document’s development is streamlined, and you know the product meets minimum requirements established by a consensus of industry professionals, representing manufacturers, utility personnel, consultants, academics, and other industry sectors.

Each standard contains a list of Purchaser Options and Alternatives, items you should specify when requesting a quote or executing a purchase. The list walks you through a menu of choices to ensure a product meets your particular situation. Typical equipment options include size, coating, and preferred construction material. In chemical standards, typical options include concentration, physical form, material grade, container size and type, and shipping preference. By using these lists to develop a purchase document, you have the information necessary for a smooth transaction. And, best of all, the information is right at your fingertips, clearly defining items that should be included in your purchase document.

**EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT**

AWWA Standards will also help your utility keep options open when it’s time to replace equipment, because they help ensure dimension and operation compatibility among products from diverse manufacturers. A meter or valve purchased according to an AWWA Standard typically can be replaced with an equivalent product from a different manufacturer. If you need a replacement quickly, and your original supplier is on back order or has discontinued production of that item, you can often find another supplier with an available equivalent item, limiting your downtime.

Standards are also valuable when you’re evaluating aged infrastructure in your system. If you would like to know more about old equipment without removing it and interrupting service, you can review the equipment’s properties in the historical standard that was in place at the time of installation. The historical standard, which contains information about construction materials, dimensions, and operational aspects, will help you determine if a replacement piece will work and if modifications are required. AWWA maintains a historical library of all editions of all its standards, copies of which can be obtained through AWWA’s customer service department.

**USE OUTSIDE OF UTILITIES**

Utilities aren’t the only beneficiaries of AWWA Standards. Because regulators, manufacturers, suppliers, academics, and consultants participate in developing standards, they can also benefit from using them. Regulators use AWWA Standards as a baseline for minimum quality required when developing industry regulations. Based on a consensus of the water supply industry, AWWA Standards are minimum best practices, ensuring that a product described in a standard will provide satisfactory service. Having this trusted resource decreases the amount of research and review needed to produce a safe and fair regulation. AWWA Standards are often adopted as part of a regulation.

**OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT**

Standards also fulfill other needs. During the last five years, AWWA has added a group of standards specifically designed to guide utilities in the areas of operation and management. These standards cover the principal activities of typical water utilities, from source to tap. The goal of these standards is to provide resources that will help utilities meet day-to-day management challenges and tools and programs that support continuous improvement. Examples of individual topics in the series include resources and tools for water treatment plants, distribution systems, source water protection, utility management systems, emergency planning, security, and business practices. Additional topics will be added, including those for wastewater utilities. Standards in this group are identified by the letter G in their designation (G100, G200, G430, etc.). If your utility personnel haven’t looked at these standards, we encourage you to check them out.
AWWA Standards provide manufacturers with a target for product design and lets them know purchasers’ expectations for a given product. A standard list of purchaser options and alternatives helps manufacturers and suppliers have clear communications with purchasers and limits costly miscommunications during the purchasing process. An AWWA Standard helps bridge the gap between product manufacturers and purchasers.

Consultants and designers benefit greatly from AWWA Standards as well. Designing a system around standard products leads to simplified designs, easier construction, and cost efficiency. Using trusted AWWA Standards gives a designer peace of mind about a product.

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

AWWA now offers more than 145 standards on various chemicals, valves, pipes, pumps, and other subjects pertinent to the water industry, with more standards in the works. The intent of the standards program—helping folks like you to know a product described in an AWWA Standard will provide satisfactory service—hasn’t changed.

Amassing the industry’s collective knowledge and sharing that knowledge with utilities is one of the reasons AWWA was founded in 1881. Standards provided a straightforward way for early association members to accomplish that goal. Those efforts continue today.

Editor’s Note: A complete list of AWWA Standards begins on page 24.