

Director's letter



Robert Stewart
RCAP Executive Director

May and June in the Washington, D.C., area were abnormally hot, with a record number of days with highs in the 90s. Hot and dry summer weather can remind us that clean, affordable and readily available drinking water is a resource that must be conserved and protected.

One of the articles in this issue addresses the impacts of bottled water operations in rural communities. At times, these bottling activities can adversely impact groundwater resources in rural areas, generate new waste products and greatly increase truck traffic on rural roads not designed for such heavy use. Although promises of economic development and employment are made in conjunction with these operations, rural communities are faced with tradeoffs between what few jobs might be created versus the negative and long-term environmental impacts of heavy withdrawals from local aquifers. It's also important to note that most bottled water operations receive their water from municipal systems. As a supporter of community water systems, RCAP works with local residents, utility staff and elected officials to ensure that the water from your tap is not only affordable but meets all state and federal drinking water quality regulations.

While there is a never-ending array of regulatory requirements facing all drinking water utilities, including the groundwater rule discussed in this issue, EPA is making another attempt to clarify and simplify its approach to regulated contaminants in drinking water. EPA is considering a more cost-effective approach of addressing contaminants within a group rather than individually, as well as the development of new treatment technologies that address health risks posed by a broad array of contaminants. At the same time, EPA continues to identify individual carcinogenic compounds for which regulations will be proposed. To this end, EPA has initiated a comprehensive process to gather input from all relevant stakeholders and the public. RCAP will be assisting EPA in this process, and we will provide additional information on our website in the coming months. RCAP field staff, working under EPA and state primacy agency programs, continue to assist small rural communities with compliance matters and to seek their input on new regulatory and programmatic initiatives such as these.

And let's not forget other water supply and affordability issues. Specifically, I'm referring to water loss, or, as some would say, unaccounted-for water or non-revenue water. For some utilities, upwards of 25 percent of the water that is treated never makes it to customers. There is no national regulatory requirement or standard in this area, even though some states are moving in this direction. Too often utilities operate in the reactive mode concerning water loss; if someone reports a water main break, it is then fixed. The potential cost savings to the customer from eliminating all types of water loss is substantial, and not enough attention is being paid by state and federal agencies to this issue. For example, transmission and distribution lines need to be monitored and replaced as needed, customer meters should be regularly maintained, and operations must be monitored to eliminate leakage or overflows from storage tanks. Do you know how much non-revenue water your utility produces (or loses)?

Finally, I want to welcome Marcie McLaughlin to RCAP as a new member of our national board of directors and the new CEO of the Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), the Midwest RCAP. Marcie has a wealth of experience with rural communities (see Rural Developments, p. 8), and we are looking forward to her active participation in our partnership! ■