

UNDERSTANDING WHY

by
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Do you know why the water system you work for needs a Small Water System Management Plan or why you took lead and copper samples at the kitchen or bathroom tap? Have you ever stopped and thought about how many lives you touch every minute of every day? How important is your job? Consequently, how important is it that you understand why you perform the tasks you do?

One of the misconceptions in our industry is that we sell "WATER". We do not sell water! Rates are based on the time and expenses needed to keep the water safe and reliable. The next time someone says to you "what gives you the right to sell water; it falls from the sky and it is my God given right," simply reply, "I am not selling you water. I am selling you the services of making sure the water is safe to drink."

Did you know water systems are required to run a financially viable system? This means the established rates need to cover day-to-day operations, an amount set aside for emergencies and a replacement fund.

Too many times I hear Operators say "my water users cannot afford higher rates." In actuality they cannot afford not to be charged enough. Your service is extremely important. No one can survive without water! You are running a business that is essential to life itself. Remember it costs you more today to provide a gallon of finished water than it did just a year ago. The cost of electricity, insurances, gasoline, chemicals and laboratory services has gone up. At a minimum this needs to be reflected in an annual rate increase. Gas and insurance have gone up and the cars are still running. The cable television is still on despite annual increases. Neither of these services is necessary to survive. Your product is!

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) gives us clear regulations on how to provide clean, safe, adequate drinking water. How many times have you

grumbled about the SDWA and the expense around implementing the requirements? Without the SDWA where would you begin? How would you know if the source is being affected by run off from a feed lot up stream? Would you really have any idea if the water you are providing has been affected by some abandoned underground storage tank? We live in an industrialized nation and, as various industries progress, we will need to address their by-products and how this will affect our drinking water. We need the SDWA so these safe levels will continue to be established.

At the turn of this century, in a town with a population of 4500 outside of Toronto, twenty four hundred people were seen in the emergency room over a long weekend. Four hundred and fifty of these people sustained life long illnesses, with many of them on kidney dialysis for the rest of their lives, and seven people died. Why? They trusted that the water they were drinking from their tap was safe. It was not safe and public notification was not done in a timely manner. As the story unfolded, what we learned was this water system was required to chlorinate and have a wellhead protection program, if they were going to use the source in question. They were required to do this because the well was shallow and downstream of a feed lot. The Operators failed to keep the chlorination system on 24 hours a day, seven days a week and they did not institute the wellhead program. So many things went wrong from lack of education, lack of support from upper management to the Operators' attitude and lack of integrity. Was it their intent to cause the death of seven people? No, but their lack of understanding of the importance of their job and implementing regulations has sentenced them to a lifetime of remembering those seven lives.

How many lives do you affect every day? The people, who live, work, recreate, attend school and pass through your water system, depend on you. Do you understand what your requirements are and why they are required? Your water users' lives depend on your knowledge, your work ethics and your integrity. For a long time we have been considered the "silent service" yet our product is the one product on the market we cannot live without. You are the caretaker of this life sustaining product.

