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## EDITORIAL letter

# Tap Water: From Best to Far from Perfect

Recently, vacation and back-to-back business travel took me away from home for almost a month. While I love to travel and look forward to visiting new places, one thing always requires a bit of a adjustment—the taste of tap water.

In a short period of time, I visited close to 10 different cities around the country and had a chance to sample the water in each. I'm sure it won't be a surprise to our industry when I say that there are towns and cities around the country where the tap water is far from perfect.

From an aesthetic point of view, I had anything but the common chlorinated tap water that I am well-adjusted to having lived in Chicago for almost 10 years. In some areas I experienced fishy or slightly muddy tasting water and, even more surprisingly, water that felt almost chewy. Still, that is not to say that there aren't cities in the U.S. that provide great-tasting, quality tap water.

In June, the U.S. Conference of Mayors chose St. Louis, Mo., as the Best Tasting City Water in America at its 75<sup>th</sup> annual meeting. Among the finalists were Anaheim, Calif., Colorado Springs, Colo., Long Beach, Calif., and Toledo, Ohio, which were selected for their achievement in providing great tasting, good quality water.

Although cities have achieved much success in providing water infrastructure and services in the U.S., many small and rural communities struggle to deliver quality drinking water to their residents.

According to the EPA, approximately 54,000 community water systems—of which 85% are small (501 to 3,300 people) or very small (25 to 500 people)—serve 10% of the nation's population. The key challenge facing these communities today is the need to comply with federal and state regulations. Compliance, however, requires funding for facility development and upgrade, which is often difficult for small communities to obtain.

If my recent travel is any indication, every town and city faces unique drinking water service challenges. Yet I still think it is small drinking water systems in non-metropolitan areas serving populations with low incomes that struggle the most.

In addition to compliance and under-funding, it is not secret that small water systems are in dire need of competent operating personnel. While new technology is essential for the delivery of an adequate drinking water service, a lack of knowledgeable personnel will cause even a well-funded water system to fail to deliver safe drinking water to its customers.

Although these are not emerging issues, a large number of communities continue to rely on small water systems for their drinking water supply; therefore, these issues are critical and cannot be ignored for long.

Ultimately, water systems must continue to search for creative solutions and partnerships that would enable them to provide long-term quality water service.

One way to bridge this information gap is seeing examples of how other small systems have overcome their challenges. *Water & Wastes Digest's* quarterly special section Rural & Small Utility Systems is featured in this issue and offers various examples of possible solutions for these important issues.



Neda Simeonova, editorial director  
nsimeonova@sgcmail.com

## COMING UP NEXT MONTH...

- Membrane Filtration
- Mapping Systems & GIS
- SCADA
- UV & Ozone
- Pumps
- Plant Profile