

Rainy Days Fund



The message varies—"Control of Storm Water Fees Now Up to Voters," "Storm Water Funding May Dry Up," "Storm Water Utility Set to Buy New Street Sweeper"—but the bottom line is clear: Storm water utilities have caught on, and they're populating today's local news headlines.

Establishing a storm water utility is no simple feat; a community must determine an appropriate rate structure, gain and maintain residents' support and adhere to legal considerations, among various other challenges. An intelligently researched and executed utility, however, should

ultimately prove to be a valuable investment.

Over the next 20 years, our nation will generate a \$540-billion backlog of water and wastewater infrastructure projects, according to one U.S. EPA representative's estimate. Further aggravating this already dire situation is the frightful state of existing infrastructure; consider, for instance, the fact that more than 700 communities across the nation still utilize outdated combined sewer systems.

Federal assistance falls far short of what is needed to stay on track, let alone begin closing this immense funding gap. The time has come for municipalities to face the music and take action for the sake of present-day citizens and future generations; for many, this will mean asking residents to contribute financially to the storm water technologies and services that their community needs to keep dry, safe and lawful.

Often one of the first programs put on the chopping block in times of financial difficulty, infrastructure maintenance needs to be an integral part of a municipal storm water utility's strategic business plan. Nipping problems such as corrosion and leaks in the bud can save a community the trouble of paying double, triple or worse for emergency, after-the-fact repairs. In addition to tending to "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" assets, it is important to ensure delivery of more perceivable benefits (e.g., cleaner catch basins and drier public parks), as these will play a significant role in getting and keeping ratepayers on board.

As your group steps up its storm water efforts, don't be afraid to ask residents to do the same. Public education promotes newfound awareness and changed behaviors and attitudes, and the utility itself provides the all-important user fees—both of which promise to pay great storm water dividends in the long run.

Caitlin Cunningham, managing editor
ccunningham@sgcmail.com



How are you and your peers contributing to storm water management, treatment and monitoring efforts? Share with *SWS* the details of noteworthy industry projects. This year's Top Storm Water Projects winners will receive recognition in the November/December 2009 issue. For more information and to submit a nomination form, visit www.estormwater.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=showtoptenform.

Coming up in *SWS* ...

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- Highway Runoff
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STORM WATER SOLUTIONS

Scranton Gillette Communications, Inc.
3030 W. Salt Creek Ln. #201, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
tel: 847.391.1000 fax: 847.390.0408

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mmansour@sgcmail.com • 480.941.0510 x16
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amiller@sgcmail.com

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gtres@sgcmail.com • 480.941.0510 x15
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