

# MAINE

# WATER

# NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2003

*A Publication of the Maine Water Utilities Association*

Number 113

## **Add Some Process to the Recipe**

*Jeffrey LaCasse, President*

OK, back to the "M" word (with modification). Some of our friends in the Maine water utility industry are currently getting some very strong overtures from outsiders who are seeking to change their form of ownership. This is not a new concept, but it appears to be gaining momentum in scattered locations around the state.

In my last message, I preached the need for utilities to "mind their own business" – to operate with efficiencies that take away the allure of an outside takeover by minimizing any potential profit margin to the outsider. I stand by that argument, but it appears there are still many who - while minding their own business by providing an excellent product and service and meeting all regulatory demands - do not have the time, finances, or political savvy to successfully counter overtures by outsiders.

A prevailing feeling after many conversations on this topic is that there are excellent water utility operations regardless of form of ownership. Private ownership, municipal department, districts, and hybrids all function successfully in Maine. We shouldn't care what type of new ownership is proposed. That is not the issue. If there is an ownership change proposed for a water utility, however, shouldn't there be a process required with some standards to meet? The formation of each utility required much scrutiny. Shouldn't an ownership change require some similar degree of regulatory scrutiny?

An ownership change may indeed be the best course of action for a utility. Many takeovers are justified, however, by stating that the change is in the best interests of the consumer. That consumer typically has no input into the takeover. John and Jane Doe just do not have much interest in how the local water utility is run. If someone, using a particular set of marketing or sales skills, promises them a better deal, why would they not take it? After all, regulations are in place with the intent to force whoever operates their local water utility to provide them with the same quality of product. So, why take

the time to look further? Take the deal that will save money.

An ownership change should not be reduced to just a business proposition; there should also be a focus on public health concerns. There really need to be some consumer protections included in the process. There should be an assurance that some degree of oversight precedes any change as radical as an ownership change may be. Some sets of learned, objective eyes should be required prior to approval. Capacity development guidelines could be used to require new ownership to show technical, financial, and managerial capability to operate water systems. In most cases this will not be a problem, but if it is a problem perhaps an ownership change should not be allowed.

What does this have to do with MWUA? Is this a knee-jerk, defensive reaction? Probably to some degree. MWUA does, however, have a mission to "support the mutual interests of the membership and to enhance public health, safety, and welfare ... through .... the development and promotion of education, legislation, standards, and policies...."

I feel MWUA has an obligation to offer assistance to our affected membership - to provide them with tools that they normally would not have access to as they seek to present their case as part of the overall evaluation. I feel almost no Maine water utility alone has the resources or wherewithal to provide adequate information to counter a determined takeover effort. The existing utility should be part of the dialogue to ensure that its customers' best interests will be addressed.

MWUA has a chance to impact the process through legislation. We are presently evaluating if we should introduce legislation to require a specific process with specific standards in such situations. Typically, MWUA is very active in legislative proceedings, but usually it is testifying as a proponent or opponent of submitted legislation. It is rare for MWUA to propose legislation. Initiating legislation is a big step. It might not end up as we intend. The legislature is a political body after all. The formation of legislation is worth serious perusal. We will be seriously perusing. Stay tuned.

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Material of interest to the water supply profession will be considered for publication. Copy deadline is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of month preceding publication.

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## Committee Corner

**Education and Operations Committee:** The Committee is working on finalizing the 2004 training calendar. Topics for classes include a budgeting program, corrosion control, hydraulics, an office personnel session, and computer classes with the Maine Community College system. In addition to MWUA's regular schedule of classes, NEWWA will be offering monthly training sessions at the Jeff Nixon Development Center at the Portland Water District. Check the MWUA website in the coming weeks for a schedule of courses, and check your mail for listings from MWUA and NEWWA. Remember that operators with **licenses ending in an odd number must submit renewal credits by December 31, 2003.** You will need ½ the number that your license requires (i.e. Class III must have 12 TCH's, of which up to ½ can be safety credits.) If you have questions about your license or TCH requirements, please call Terry Trott at the Drinking Water Program (207) 287-7485 or check the Drinking Water Program webpage at [www.state.me.us/dhs/eng/water](http://www.state.me.us/dhs/eng/water). If you have ideas for sessions, please get in touch with one of the committee member. Technical inserts for the newsletter are always welcome; contact Dan Bisson at (207) 829-6200 if you have an idea for or would like to submit an article.

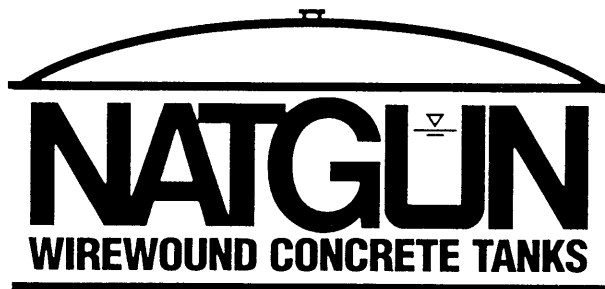
**Public Awareness:** The PAC has been relatively quiet this summer. The committee has been working with MWUA to train Jeff and Carrie to update the website, and progress is being made. The PAC would also like to post every member's Consumer Confidence Report (or, preferably, a link to it) on the MWUA website as a point of one-stop shopping for public information. If you don't have a CCR that is already on the internet, send it in to MWUA so it can be scanned and posted online as an Adobe Acrobat file.

## Golf and Clambake Go Off Without a Hitch

It was a wet August, but the skies did clear in time for the golf tournament and the clambake. One member, who indicated he would be on vacation that week, did say that he was going to plan an outdoor activity that day, as he was fairly confident of good weather. We are truly blessed to have had the kind of weather we've had for as many years as anyone can remember.

The course at Springbrook was a little soggy, but the 95 stalwarts who braved the course had a very enjoyable time. The Banquet following the event featured great food, raffles and a new Lobster Red Jacket recipient whose picture ended up in a local paper.

We ate a little early at the clambake and that spread out the 500+ who showed up for the day's festivities. There were no long lines; things went slick as smelts. A special thank you to the many hands of all the volunteers who pitched in to make it light work. It really went smoothly. As always, the effort of the vendors is very much appreciated as well.



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**Shaken: The BOND Issue**

*Contributed by  
Jeffrey LaCasse, President*

This is a very big deal. For the first time, legislators let water utilities down, passing up significant federal matching funds by reducing the allotment of state funds to be requested in the November environmental bond.

After an extended period of political wrangling, the legislature substantially cut the drinking water portion of the bond issue that will go before voters in November. Instead of seeking \$1.8 million from Maine voters to qualify for \$8 million of federal funds, the legislature trimmed the environmental bond to around \$1.2 million for the state's allocation. In essence, it reduces the amount of free federal money available.

In addition, the message derived from the legislative action may give voters the notion that the money is not important to the state and, as a result, could potentially sway enough voters against the expense to actually kill the issue at election. That is worst-case scenario, one that would definitely impact Maine water utilities in many ways. Remember, this money funds the Drinking Water Program, many annual projects for state water utilities, and some MRWA and MWUA functions.

Nancy Beardsley and the DWP staff are presently investigating options to make up the \$400,000-\$500,000 necessary to match what is expected in federal funding.

The task for Maine water utilities is to educate voters so that the funding will pass muster in the November election. MWUA will be active in preparing educational and promotional material to aid members in bringing the issue forward. MWUA will attempt to make the process easy, but membership participation is

important.

Now that the legislature has cut funding once, it is easier for it to happen again. That does not bode well for future. This issue is going to require tender loving care now and in the future.

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**NEWWA Schedules Water  
Resources Symposium**

Declining streamflows and increasingly frequent water use restrictions are leading many to rethink how much water we have available and to identify ways to make those resources go further. New England Water Works Association has designed a water resources symposium titled: ***WATERWARS-ARE THERE PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS?*** to bring water suppliers, environmentalists and other water users together to begin talking about realistic solutions to water allocation conflicts. The session will be held October 30<sup>th</sup> in Boxborough, Massachusetts.

The program will include an overview of water management challenges; measuring the impact of withdrawals and the allocation of streamflow; factors influencing the siting and design of groundwater recharge facilities; reclaimed water and other topics.


Keynote speaker Robert Varney, EPA Regional Administrator for New England, will discuss EPA's role in water allocation. Ralph Abele, of U.S. EPA will speak on updating state stream flow policy in New England

A special municipal panel will discuss water conservation rate strategies. For registration materials or more information, contact NEWWA or the MWUA office.

**Meter Bench for Sale – Cheap**

The Kennebunk, Kennebunkport & Wells Water District has a 10 place meter bench, that takes 5/8" and 3/4" meters. Contact Don Holbrook at 985-3385 for details.

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## MWUA Annual Award Nominations Sought

Annually, MWUA recognizes those members whose contributions enhance the association's mission and who have made a significant impact on our profession.

The awards include the Jeff Nixon Distinguished Service Award, the Sid Anthony Award of Merit, the President's Award, the Jim Doherty Excellence in Volunteerism Award and the Excellence in Operations Award. The nomination deadline for all but the latter award is December 1. The nomination deadline for the Excellence in Operations Award is October 1.

Application forms are available from the office. All members are encouraged to submit nominations for consideration!

## Nominating Committee Recommends Candidates for Board

Nominations for Directors are presented at the October meeting by the Nominating Committee or from the floor by any member. The By-Laws require that the membership be notified, in writing, of the committee's selections for the nomination of Directors at least ten days prior to the October meeting.

The Nominating Committee met August 7. Chair Scott Minor reports that the committee has selected the following nominations for Directors for two 3-year terms, starting in 2004:

John Barlow, Paris Utilities District  
Chris Crovo, Portland Water District  
Seth Garrison, Bath Water District  
Jeff LaCasse, Kennebec Water District  
Brian Tarbuck, Augusta Water District  
Chris Curtis, Yarmouth Water District

Printed ballots will be mailed to all eligible voting members in late October. The ballots will contain nominations made by the Nominating Committee and such other nominations which are made from the floor at the October membership meeting. Eligible candidates who can be nominated from the floor include Individual, Retired and Honorary Members of the association who are members in good standing. The ballots will also contain a biographical profile of each nominee.

Ballots are to be returned to the office and must be postmarked no later than 14 days from the mailing date. The envelope containing the ballot must be signed by the voting member.

David Parent of the Sanford Water District, past President and current director serving the last year of a three year term, chose not to seek reelection. Current directors whose terms expire at the end of 2004 include Mike Nadeau of the South Berwick Water District and Judy Kelley of Consumers Maine Water Company.

Directors whose terms expire at the end of 2005 include Bill Alexander of the Brunswick-Topsham Water District, Mary Jane Dillingham of the Auburn Water District and Skip Dumais of the Van Buren Water District.

## SAFETYWORKS! Program Offered

Workplace safety and health classes for the Fall of 2003 continue to be offered free of charge by the Maine Department of Labor with pre-registration. For detailed course descriptions and class schedules, contact them toll free at 877-SAFE-345 or try their website at [www.Maine.gov/labor/blsmain.htm](http://www.Maine.gov/labor/blsmain.htm).

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## ***"Can you hear me now?"***






### ***Keeping your telephone skills up to speed.***

The telephone is a wonderful invention. It helps us communicate, lets us stay in touch with family and friends, keeps the wheels of business turning, and is quite literally a life saver. Imagine how much harder work would be, how isolated we would feel, if suddenly there were no telephones.

But...don't you wish that once in a while you could throw the phone off the desk, or at least ignore the ringing for an hour or two? Angry or difficult customers, persistent sales calls, unfriendly and unhelpful operators, and the ever-present "if you know your party's extension..." can sometimes make picking up the receiver to answer or place a call a chore we'd all like to put off until at least tomorrow.

Although we can't silence the ringer or delay a call, there are things we can do to make telephone calls simpler and less stressful, for both incoming and outgoing calls. Make sure your own telephone skills and manners are the best they can be. Simple courtesy is usually the best way to handle most situations.

#### **Angry or difficult customers:**

-  Let the customer vent a little. It helps them calm down, and you can use the time to start finding a solution to their (real or imagined) problem. It's not easy to have to listen to, and sometimes you may just have to turn the caller over to your supervisor.
-  When a customer has told you what their issue is, repeat it back to them so they know you've been listening. Let them know you understand their feelings without necessarily agreeing with what they're saying. Positive attitudes and a sense of humor can go a long way toward turning a situation from being confrontational to one where you and the customer are working together to fix a problem. If possible, try to find some common ground (dogs, kids, books) that will let the caller know that you're a person, not just a voice on the other end of the line.
-  Don't make promises you can't keep. If you say you'll call them back by a certain time, make sure you do, even if you haven't found the answer yet. This proves your commitment to solving their problem.
-  Don't listen to abusive language or threats. Make it clear that you are willing to talk to them about their issue, but they will have to call back when they have calmed down. If threats are persistent, contact your local law enforcement authorities immediately.
-  Some callers are always going to interrupt you. You may not even be able to say "Good morning, Community Wat...." without the person cutting you off. Start again, get your message across, and stay calm. This helps you maintain control of the situation, and lets the caller know that you're not going to be bullied. Standing up may also help you stay in control of a difficult call.

#### **Unhelpful/rude operators:**

The tips listed above can also help when you've made a call and the person you're talking to just doesn't want to take the time to help. Be polite, be persistent, and try to find some common ground. Don't settle for less than what you need, but don't become sarcastic or demeaning. Do your venting when you get off the phone; chances are you may need to call them again and you don't want to burn any bridges and make the next call even more difficult! If you are getting nowhere, ask to speak to a supervisor.

## Our own telephone skills – making and taking calls:

- ☎ Let the person answering your call finish their greeting. Identify yourself at the beginning of the conversation. Thank the person for their help.
- ☎ Speak clearly, and know what you are going to say. It might help to write down your key points before you make the call.
- ☎ When leaving a voice mail, give your name, business, and phone number, and leave a brief, clear message. Don't speak too quickly, and give your name and phone number again at the end of your message.
- ☎ Get the name and extension number of the person you are calling. Sometimes people are much more helpful if they think you may take your complaint to the next level.
- ☎ Don't eat or chew gum when speaking on the phone.
- ☎ When you have to put a caller on hold, let them know ("May I put you on hold for just a moment?") and when you get back to them, thank them for waiting.
- ☎ If you don't have the answer to a question right at your fingertips, let the caller know you will find out what you can, and call them back when you say you will, even if you have to tell them you haven't found an answer yet.
- ☎ Rephrase a customer's complaint and repeat it back to them; this lets them know you were paying attention and can often keep them from saying the same thing over and over again.
- ☎ The informal manner that we use with family and friends is often not suitable for business calls. Keep your language and tone appropriate to the situation.
- ☎ Sometimes we may have to sound a little forceful to get our point across, but there is never any need to use unpleasant language or to be sarcastic or demeaning. Treating people the way we would like to be treated is still one of the best guidelines to follow. There will be times when no matter how courteous you are, the caller will continue to be rude and aggravating. You may come away from the call feeling angry and frustrated. Knowing you've done your best can make dealing with the aftermath of a difficult call much easier.



Here's a tip for the person standing next to your desk and talking when you're trying to handle a call: **Go Somewhere Else!!** It's tough enough to take care of a customer, or try to get someone to help you, without listening to people argue about last night's baseball score or exchanging recipes for chocolate cake.

*Contributed by Joan McArdle  
Administrative Assistant, Yarmouth Water District*

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### **Maine Safety and Health Conference Set For End of Month**

The Maine Safety Council's annual conference is September 23-25 at the Holiday Inn By the Bay in Portland. Professional development courses are being provided in general industry, construction, wellness, leadership in safety and hazardous waste management practices. To register or for a listing of sessions, contact Maine Safety Council at 800-369-0040 or email [@mainesafety.org](mailto:@mainesafety.org).

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### **Program Committee Seeking Topics and Volunteers for Technical Modules**

This year the February Meeting will have a new feature, as technical modules will be held at the trade show throughout the day on Tuesday. These mini seminars will focus on new technology discussions/presentations, technical or professional presentations (e.g. selecting a consultant), product demonstrations and other topics that can be delivered in 30-60 minutes.

The Program Committee is seeking ideas for these modules and volunteers who would present them. Please contact Stephani Morancie at [stepani.morancie@maine.gov](mailto:stepani.morancie@maine.gov) or by phone at 287-3056 or contact the MWUA office prior to October 1 if you have an interest in participating.

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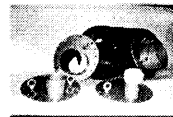
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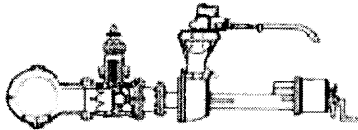
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**Stormwater Management in Cold Climates  
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This is the first North American conference of its kind and will draw both national and international presenters and attendees from cold climate regions of the U.S., Canada, and Europe. The two-day conference (November 4-5, 2003) will include a pre-conference training and other events on November 3. For more information, please visit [www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/coldsw.html](http://www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/coldsw.html) or contact Todd Janeski at the Maine State Planning Office at [todd.janeski@maine.gov](mailto:todd.janeski@maine.gov) or Susy Kist, Conference Coordinator, at 207-228-8085. \*An excellent opportunity to exhibit. There is still space in our exhibit hall for organizations offering stormwater-related products and services! Please contact LeeAnn Hanson at the Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee at 207-253-8020 or [jetcc@maine.rr.com](mailto:jetcc@maine.rr.com).

\*Sponsorships are still available\*: Please see our sponsorship packages at [www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/cssponsor.html](http://www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/cssponsor.html). to learn more.

This conference is presented by the Casco Bay Estuary Project, Maine Coastal Program/Maine State Planning Office, and Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District in cooperation with the Northeast Chapter of IECA, the Center for Watershed Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission.


This conference is being sponsored by Vortech, the Cooperative Institute for Coastal Environmental Estuarine Technology (CICEET), Hydro International, the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Horsley and Whitten. Additional conference partners include NEMO, MDEP, and MDOT.




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**October Meeting  
Offers Informative Topics**

The Farmington Village Corporation Water Department is hosting the October meeting and it looks to be a great session in a really nice location.

Gary Smith of Earth Tech will provide a primer on angle well technology, a procedure that has opened up the potential development of new water supply sources in areas that were previously unsuitable for the construction of conventional vertical wells.

William Devoe, Esquire, of Eaton-Peabody, will discuss the Maine Tort Claims Act, specifically as it relates to water utility operations.

The Granary Brew Pub and Restaurant, the site of the meeting, is known for its fine fare and ambiance. October is a beautiful time in the western mountains; we hope that many can meet us there for a great day.



**HOST:** FARMINGTON VILLAGE CORPORATION WATER DEPARTMENT  
*Tom Holt, Superintendent*

**LOCATION:** Granary Brew Pub and Restaurant, Farmington  
147 Pleasant Street, Farmington Phone: 207-779-0710

**DIRECTIONS:** From the Augusta exits on 95 on Civic Center Drive take Route 27 North (24.4 miles) to Route 2 turn left on Rt. 2, go 9.7 miles to a set of lights, take a right onto Main Street at the lights in Farmington, .2 miles later take a left onto Front Street (right next and after McDonalds). The Granary is .5 miles on your left. There are parking lots before and after the Granary.

**PARKING:** There is limited parking at the Granary and they would prefer it if our members used the municipal parking lot on Pleasant Street (upper level parking on Pleasant Street and municipal parking by the Narrow Gauge Cinemas).

**PROGRAM**

8:30AM – 9:00AM	<b>Registration</b>
9:00AM – 9:30AM	<b>Welcome to Farmington</b> <i>Tom Holt, Superintendent</i>
9:30AM – 10:00AM	<b>Business Meeting</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nominations for 2004 Directors</li> <li>• Regulatory Update</li> </ul>

**TECHNICAL PROGRAM**

10:00AM – 10:45AM	<b>Angle Well Technology</b> <i>Gary Smith, Earth Tech</i>
11:00AM – 11:45AM	<b>Maine Tort Claims Act</b> <i>William Devoe, Esquire; Eaton-Peabody</i>
11:45AM – 12:00 NOON	<b>Wrap-Up Questions and Answers</b>
12:00PM	<b>Buffet Luncheon</b>

**Jeffrey LaCasse**  
*President*

**Bruce Goucher and Stephani Morancie**  
*Program Coordinators*

2.0 Training Contact Training Hours will be granted for this session.  
**PLEASE RETURN RESERVATIONS BY Friday, October 3, 2003**  
**PREPAYMENT IS APPRECIATED. RESERVATIONS MUST BE HONORED.**

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**Registration for MWUA October 9, 2003 Membership Meeting**

<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>License #</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Meeting @ \$25:</b>
<i>Water Systems serving less than 10,000 persons (4,000 customers)</i>	_____
	<b>Meeting @ \$15:</b> _____ (small systems only)
	<b>Total enclosed:</b> _____

Mail to: Maine Water Utilities Association, P.O. Box P, Waldoboro, ME 04572-0917; FAX (207) 832- 2265

**Thanks to all who sent in Strategic Plan Surveys!** *MWUA, being a member driven organization, needs the input of its members in developing and implementing a strategic plan to carry it forward for the next few years. The response from the surveys was heartening. If you have not already done so, it is not too late to complete and return the survey. Please submit to the office in the envelope provided with your survey.*

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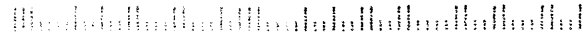
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