

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE MAZE OF ASSET MANAGEMENT

It is no longer a shock to anyone that we have been living in a myopic world when it comes to reinvesting our dollars towards water and wastewater infrastructure. The same can also be said for other municipal infrastructure such as roads, buildings, bridges, etc., but we will leave that for another day. The purpose of this article is not to regurgitate the same statistics of the infrastructure-funding shortfall in Canada, Ontario or the municipality in which I work. What I would like to do is present to you a fresh idea on asset management, one that may lead you through the maze of asset management overload.

Based on the numerous requests and an explosion of interests in asset management, a committee was formed within WEAO earlier this year, consisting of public and private sector professionals. The objective of the committee is to promote, educate and provide a forum for information exchange, when it comes to asset management and sustainability practices in the water environment industry. Asset management is not just about data inventory, technology, condition assessment, or reinvesting levels. Asset management is about meeting expectations with the amount of funding available and maintaining sustainability into the future.

When I first got involved in asset management, I thought it was an interesting and important side of the wastewater collection and treatment system. I was excited and read up on what asset management is, including the now defunct InfraGuide manuals. That was a really good start. However, I wanted to

know more, especially with what other municipalities are doing and how I can apply what I learned to my own situation. So I attended a number of workshops and conferences relating to asset management. I soon found out that this field is as wide as the open fields of the prairie farmland. There were condition assessment workshops, software workshops, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) seminars, and infrastructure funding conferences, all with the asset management stamp. However, one thing was common with all these events, they were great to attend, but the information was difficult to apply.

Now, don't get me wrong, the topics were very interesting and the speakers did a fabulous job, but I left most events with a lot of information in my head and not too much in my workbook. I was constantly wondering, how could I put the pieces together, and how could it be applied to my own organization? How many of you have left a seminar or conference feeling the same way? Well, this is what the Asset Management Committee is trying to avoid.

In conjunction with OWWA, the Asset Management Committee is organizing a seminar on November 13, 2008 at the Venetian Banquet Hall. This will be the first of a series of workshops on asset management. The plan is to provide a venue in which organizations can share their asset management experiences with other organizations and learn from each other's successes and failures.

In the first workshop, we will outline a framework of an asset management program, with speakers from local cities and municipalities, as well as a speaker from the City of Calgary. Attendees will gain an understanding of where their organization is with respect to the

framework, how they are doing compared to other organizations, and what they need to do in order to advance to the next step. The main message is that there are others who were in the exact same position as you are in right now. What words of wisdom can they pass along? Throughout my relatively short career in asset management, I have found that many speakers and attendees of a seminar want to share more information and their experiences with each other, but may not know where to start or what issues are of interest to everyone.

Future workshops will build upon the information gathered from the first workshop, and will be focused on each component of the framework. The plan is to delve deeper into each component, bring in the best practices within the industry, and share each other's information and experiences. The interactive and information sharing theme of the initial workshop will remain the same throughout the series of workshops. The goal at the end of each workshop is for you to take something tangible back to your organization and share, implement, or initiate tasks so that, at each of the subsequent workshops, there may be something to report back to the group of attendees regarding your organization's successes, obstacles or failures.

For full details of this upcoming asset management workshop, please visit the WEAO web site at www.weao.org. Inquires regarding the committee can be directed to:

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