



NEWEA Congressional Briefing – April 14-15, 2015

Talking Points for Congressmen and Senators

Deteriorating Wastewater Infrastructure

It is no secret that the United States' infrastructure systems are aging and deteriorating. Our wastewater infrastructure is no exception; it needs significant repair and replacement! The US EPA estimates a \$500 billion funding gap exists between current and needed investment to ensure continued viability of our Nation's water and sewer infrastructure.

- Sustainable funding is needed to maintain and improve our water infrastructure
- Much of our wastewater system is buried or out of sight, unlike roads and bridges, and gets limited attention. But if aging wastewater systems are not addressed, failures will inevitably impact public health and the environment
- Investment in clean water projects creates jobs
 - Effective water and wastewater systems are vital to a strong economy
 - Every \$1 million invested supports 28 jobs!
- We believe that addressing the significant infrastructure needs should be a bipartisan concern, especially when investing in these systems will support our emerging economy

Clean Water State Revolving Fund

EPA has requested a budget of \$1.12 billion for FY16, below the \$1.45 billion in last year's budget, which has been consistent over the previous decade.

- Our wastewater infrastructure needs are well in excess of these budgets (estimated at \$52.4 billion in the Northeast alone) and are growing, not shrinking as our pipes and treatment facilities age!
- We ask Congress to increase this critical funding source; and fund at no less than \$1.45 billion
- As part of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA), EPA will be reviewing the allocation of CWSRF funds to the states. We are concerned that shifting away from the historical allotments in the Clean Water Act (CWA) to a new quadrennial Clean Watersheds Needs Survey could result in tens of millions of dollars being reallocated away from our region.

Additional Financing and Affordability Issues

- **WIFIA** - The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Authority program was part of the WRRDA bill passed in 2014. This is currently a pilot program (funded proposed at \$5 million). To request \$25 million for FY16 so that the program can be fully developed.
- **Municipal Bonds** - NEWEA urges Congress to retain the current federal tax exemption for municipal bonds. Local utilities rely on tax-exempt municipal bonds as a major source of financing for water and wastewater projects, and changing the tax exemption would significantly impact availability and costs of borrowing.
- **Affordability** – Clean Water Act guidelines developed in 1997 set an “affordability” threshold at 2 percent of median household income. This definition has become unworkable for many municipalities with significant income disparities, and a new definition, and new funding support, is needed in order to help utilities address regulatory requirements in a sustainable, affordable manner.



WORKING FOR WATER QUALITY New England Water Environment Association

Congressional Briefing • Wednesday, April 15, 2015



Issues Facing the Clean Water Industry

The Clean Water industry, which could also be called the water resource recovery industry, faces a variety of additional issues, including:

- **Ocean Acidification** – Ocean acidification is a global water quality issue primarily caused by excess atmospheric carbon dioxide absorbed into the ocean. For coastal New England, the impact of ocean acidification is magnified in coastal areas that are also nutrient-rich and eutrophic. There is pressure on EPA and coastal states to address this issue through the CWA impaired waters law (Section 303(d)), but the data are incomplete and there is disagreement as to the best management approaches. We recommend increased monitoring and research to provide the data needed to inform management actions on this serious and growing issue.
- **Climate Change** - Sea level is rising and severe weather is becoming more frequent and intense. Water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructures are vulnerable to climate change; support funding for improvements in resiliency in climate change legislation
- **Non-Dispersibles** – As the use of “wipes” and similar health care fabrics has increased, many of these products have been flushed into the nation’s sewers. Most do not degrade and have led to clogged pipes and pumps in many sewer systems, causing numerous overflows. Keeping wipes that do not disperse out of sewers through proper labelling and education is important to avoiding significant operational problems and expense.
- **Microbeads** – Synthetic plastic microbeads are being incorporated into some personal care products and over the counter drugs. We recommend that microbeads, which are not removed in wastewater treatment facilities, be prohibited from sale or use, in order to protect the environment. A number of states are considering statewide bans, and we suggest a national prohibition.

Water’s Worth It! - Our communities are built around water. Clean water is vital to America; please help preserve and protect this critical resource. Americans want clean water, and 85% of voters support increased government investment in water infrastructure.

NEWEA Members Can Help - NEWEA has over 2,100 highly qualified and motivated water and wastewater professionals dedicated to preserving, protecting and managing our precious water resources. We would be happy to provide information and feedback on water quality issues.