

## Maine Water Utilities Association's Public Awareness Committee Minutes

Mission: The *Public Awareness Committee* shall communicate to the general public on issues important to the drinking water profession and assist the membership in enhancing public awareness in their local communities.

December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 9:30 AM  
Woodard and Curran Engineers, South Portland, Maine

*Committee Members:* Joy Adamson; Mary Jane Dillingham; Kim Marchegiani; Jeffrey McNelly, Jeff Preble, Gary Stevens, Madeline Storer, Brian Tarbuck, Greg Cataldo, Michelle Clements

*Committee Members Present:* Gary Stevens, Brian Tarbuck, Greg Cataldo

The meeting was called to order at 9:40 AM by Gary Stevens.

- **There were no corrections to or comments concerning the previous minutes.**
- **The meeting launched immediately into a discussion concerning the structure and purpose of the PAC. Several changes were agreed upon:**
  - Have meetings less frequently. The new schedule will be once every two months as follows. January, March, May, July, September, November. This should improve attendance and reduce individual time away from the office.
  - Change the locations of meetings to make it easier for Gary and Kim to travel.
- **We discussed what we thought folks out there (non-utility people) might want to know about / care about water utilities and came up with these concepts:**
  - Water utilities are like nuclear power plants. We have zero tolerance for failure.
  - What is the cost of water in Maine, comparative among utilities, versus the national average, etc.
  - How healthy is water from a water utility?
  - Is there a limit to the amount of water available?
  - How might water availability be impacted by other demands for water (hydropower, salmon, lake level, minimum streamflow, etc.)
- **Greg narrowed it down to about 3 key points that consumers might be interested in based on his experience:**
  - Cost
  - Dependability / reliability
  - Compliance with regulations
- **Armed with these perceptions, we decided to challenge them using the following methods:**
  - Purchase a professional booth for use at trade shows so that we can showcase utility efforts (this would be easy to take down / transport and could be used by any of the committees who needed to display

## Public Awareness Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 17, 2003

Page 2

information). Estimated cost is around \$2,000 for a professional booth. We still need to see what MWUA has now.

- Create a “water pyramid”. How much water can you buy for one dollar? At Augusta, you can buy over 200 gallons of water for \$1. We think it will be cool to purchase 200 one gallon containers and stack them up, and put this next to a \$1 quart / liter of bottled water. This would likely be a large display, but that’s the point. Brian is seeking out cost and volume estimates for this display and how we could move it around, store it. Brian will contact Consolidated Container in Portland for pricing on empty 1 gallon jugs / cartons.
- Have a taste test of utility water versus bottled water. Greg is convinced that bottled water won’t win. Brian wasn’t so optimistic. Regardless of the outcome, the “contest” is newsworthy, and should attract some attention, particularly if folks can’t tell the difference between the two or prefer utility water. We would set this up at the Trade Show and probably the Common Ground Fair and the Children’s Water Festivals. We would need to buy some bottled water in bulk, and put both the bottled water and utility water in water coolers for sampling purposes. We propose purchasing a pair of water coolers for this purpose. They cost about \$200 per water cooler up to around \$500. I think we need electric coolers because warm water tastes like crapola. 2.5 gal polycarbonate bottles cost about \$30. What budget?! Check out [www.ehydrated.com](http://www.ehydrated.com) for details.
- Hand out water bottles (liter or so size) with utility information on it. This might be MWUA information, cost of water at different utilities, etc. Shirley from Augusta Water is looking into the cost of these items now.
- Create a tri-fold brochure that explains what the MWUA is and does so that we can hand that out at trade shows etc. Gary and Joy will work on this together. We think this should include some quick water trivia about how many people in Maine get water from public water utilities, # of utilities in Maine, % of people on public water etc.
- Create a poster to promote MWUA at schools / health clubs. The thought behind this was to create a poster that would explain where water came from, how much you should drink, where to go for health information etc. The idea was primarily aimed at the health club crowd (people drink a lot of tap water at these places and tend to be very health conscious), but it could be extended to other folks as well. Gary is going to take a crack at this using his Water Castles characters and we can knock it around. I think Portland Water made up a bunch of these a while back so we’d like to hear Michelle’s thoughts on this. Should cost about \$1 per poster.
- Finally, we thought it would be great to have another poster type sheet concerning the differences between bottled water and our water. For example, we could show firefighters dumping a bottle of water on a house fire, someone washing their car with bottled water, etc. These kinds of things could show that not only is our water safe to drink, but that it is also industrial strength (Greg prefers “Herculean” strength). I think this could work very well. By poking fun at the bottled water industry, we could call attention to our own business. This would also extend well to showing the multiple uses of tap water and how tap water is more environmentally friendly than bottled water. Note that this is not meant to bash bottled water. We all drink it from time to time, but it is a good way to emphasize that you can drink our water too. Gary and Brian are going to work some angles on this too.
- **In the course of discussion we identified items that needed significant improvement. These included:**
  - Information about utilities in Maine needs to be centrally stored. This should be kept and updated by MWUA with the assistance of the Drinking Water Program, PUC and MWUA committees. This would allow us to speak with the strength of numbers. For example, how long would it take us right now to answer a question from the press about the number of other utilities in Maine that ozonate? Or remove radon from wells? Or have arsenic above the recommended level? This is information that is critical to have quickly. Much of it is stored at the DWP. We believe that Water Resources could be tasked with

## Public Awareness Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 17, 2003

Page 3

assembling a lot of this information and we could analyze and store it. Right now it is a big pain to assemble these data and we should aim to make that data collection and analysis process faster and more straightforward.

- We should have an Environmental Summit sponsored by the MWUA to find out what Maine's environmental leaders are planning for the next few years. This would allow us to bring environmental leaders together to talk about their plans and ask them questions about their agencies. This is probably a task best suited to the Program Committee. This would help utilities plan for the future and would facilitate inter-agency communication.
- We should ask members of the NEWWA public awareness committee, Maine Wastewater etc. to attend our meetings to see what we can learn from them and where they're heading.
- We should use the calendar from the last minutes to identify events in 2004 that we plan to attend. At the next meeting we will schedule events and identify who will represent MWUA at them. This will likely require volunteers from other committees.
- We should ask the Civic Center if we can use a projector to show MWUA photos in the "big hall" so that people at the trade show can watch a looped slideshow of water utility images as they hock their wares. This would go through the Program Committee.
- We should set up our proposed displays at the MWUA trade show and hold a raffle at half-hour intervals to give away t-shirts or something if people can beat us at Dripial Pursuit. This would go through the Program Committee.
- Mad Dog, Prebs, and Greg will work with the Program Committee to put together a spreadsheet based list of "giveaways" so that the Association will have a common, working list of stuff that can be handed out at public events / trade shows. This should reduce the amount of time spent researching and locating this stuff and might identify vendors who can provide good service and low cost.
- **We concluded the meeting at about 13:00 feeling good about identifying a list of tasks to accomplish and establishing a calendar based workplan for 2004. We will nail down event dates before the next meeting and assign representatives to attend, speak or otherwise participate in these events.**

**Next meeting: Wednesday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004, 9:30 am, Augusta Water District**

**Significant Drinking Water Events Timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Outreach Opportunities</b>
February 10 – 11	MWUA February Trade Show	Booth & Presentation
<i>March 29*</i>	Maine Sportsman Show	Booth
April 16	Maine Water Conference	Booth & Presentation
May 2 – 8	Drinking Water Week	Press Coverage & Presentation
<i>May 14*</i>	Hall of Flags Day for PWSs	Press Coverage & Booth
May 23	Southern Maine Children’s Water Festival	Booth & Presentation
<i>June 20*</i>	Summer Milfoil Summit	Presentation
<i>August 14*</i>	MWUA Annual Clambake	Mingling?
<i>October 8 – 9*</i>	Maine Municipal Association Conference	Booth & Presentation
October 12	Northern Maine Children’s Water Festival	Booth & Presentation
<i>November 19*</i>	Geographic Information System (GIS) Day	Presentation
<i>December 2 – 3*</i>	MRWA Conference & Exhibition	Booth & Presentation
March	Maine Environmental Education Association	<a href="http://www.meeassociation.org">www.meeassociation.org</a>

\* 2003 date.