

MADISON WATER UTILITY
2007 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Draft Copy (v.6)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year, Madison Water Utility (MWU) has consistently not met the expectations of the Madison community for timely and effective communication on many issues. Beyond the technical issues of wells with contaminants and residents' complaints about water quality, some which went unresolved to their satisfaction for too long, citizen and employee complaints and the analysis underpinning the strategic plan conducted by EMA in late 2006 indicated that not only are a strategic plan, an infrastructure plan and a master plan critical to a successful and trusted water utility, but a communication plan that answers residents' needs and desire for prompt, consistent, factual, egalitarian and sympathetic dialogue was equally important.

In late 2006, a Communication Task Force composed of three citizens, two water commissioners, a representative of the mayor of Madison's office, the general manager and water quality manager of MWU and a consultant from EMA was formed to draft a plan for Water Board approval to direct communications activities to meet residents' needs for receiving and providing information in a timely, open and effective manner.

The Task Force discussed the current situation and its causes, events or "triggers" that should initiate a communication act, and recommended methods to deliver those messages.

It is our intent that this become the basis for a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that provides the official guide for what should be communicated to whom and how. This SOP should be reviewed quarterly as it is implemented to verify its usefulness and effectiveness. It will evolve as communication conventions, water issues and public perception of MWU change over time. Each situation, as it comes up, may be different. We don't intend the Plan - particularly the matrix - to be used mechanically. It's meant as a guide. We still expect all involved to use their judgment and experience to know how to best handle each situation. We also support building a network of communicators amongst other city, state, university or professional groups to enhance communication, message clarity and feedback.

It is equally important that internal communication undergo as rigorous an examination as external communications. The success of this plan is contingent upon internal communication which results in a well-informed staff ready to talk to anyone about all subjects. We support the work of the Design Teams (as outlined in the Strategic Plan) and intend that these plans work together to reinforce each other's activities and goals. An immediate opportunity to initiate improved internal communication is at the monthly labor management meeting.

With the intense focus needed to make this plan work and the enormity of the tasks, the Task Force strongly recommends that MWU hire a communications professional to "work the plan," continuously improve the internal and external communications and guide the leaders and staff members of the utility to develop and maintain an open, trusted dialogue with each other and the members of our community, MWU's customers.

CURRENT SITUATION (2006 - 2007)

Media Coverage

“Long ignored, the utility became the focus of media and public attention in 2006 when residents started to express dissatisfaction with its slow response to manganese darkening the water from home faucets.” – Wisconsin State Journal (December 31, 2006)

“After more than a year of dirty-looking water, contaminated wells and public relations gaffes, about one-third of city residents believe the water utility can’t be trusted to inform the public about water safety.” – Wisconsin State Journal (December 24, 2006)

Citizen Concerns

“We don’t trust that the information we’re getting is accurate. We don’t feel we’re getting candid answers.”

“I have more questions than answers.”

“They’re alarmed at the appearance that the water utility doesn’t seem to have a plan. They (utility officials) seem to go from day to day just dealing with situations as they come up. Some people are pretty angry about that.”

“People do want health information. They want to know if the water is safe for their kids. It is an emotional issue, close to their hearts.”

“I feel like if anyone in the city is drinking contaminated water, that’s a problem for the entire city.”

“One year ago, we didn’t think twice about drinking water from the kitchen tap. Today, many of us do.”

KEY ISSUES

The following key issues have been raised by customers and the public:

1. **Improved communication/accountability** – are we being told the truth about potential health implications of drinking Madison tap water?
2. **Learning Organization** – MWU needs to acquire the culture of a learning organization to better educate its employees and members of the public. The Utility needs to take responsibility for re-educating its employees and members of the public on what it does and why.
3. **Valid testing** –the most accurate tests being conducted?
4. **Notification** – are all practical and timely steps being taken to notify residents of potential issues before during and after events take place? Citizens need to be notified and communicated with on a continual basis with updates throughout any particular activity. For example, by posting a project sign during Well #10 construction, citizens nearby can be kept informed throughout the project.
5. **Lack of planning** – absence of a discernable, coordinated, planned approach to dealing with drinking water issues.
6. **Safe sustainable drinking water** – long-term health and sustainability of the aquifer.
7. **Site location for new well** – inclusive decision-making process about a new well location, regulatory issues, geographic considerations, and use. Discussion needs to take into account the physical realities of trying to locate a new well on the east isthmus as well as historical land use, regulatory issues and geographic considerations.
8. **Financial impact** – cost of improvements/remediation? Who pays? What are potential rate hikes?
9. **Public health implications** – short- and long-term risks from manganese and carbon tetrachloride? Public health officials from the City need to play a more active role in water-related issues.
10. **Internal utility communications** – a lack of effective communication within MWU has exacerbated external communication issues stemming from current culture and leadership styles. A transformation of the current culture and leadership style needs to take place.
11. **Policy-based Decisions** - a need exists for policy-based decisions and/or announcements that are clearly articulated and made available to the public. To produce consistent results, clearly written standards and policies should be developed so that actions do not deviate from Standard Operating Procedures (e.g. standards appeared to shift during Well 29 discussions.).

COMMUNICATION TRIGGERS

When does MWU need to communicate with stakeholders?

- Activity involving high profile wells (#3, 29, 10, others?)
- New well is being contemplated/planned. Public needs an opportunity to provide input.
- Health-related concerns of any kind connected with drinking water.
- All test results (positive or negative) require a clear explanation.

- Well status changes. Explain the implications of that change.
- Malfunctions, detection of contamination, security breaches of wells
- Potential financial impact on the City or ratepayers
- A cluster of similar customer complaints
- Water main breaks – impact on traffic, anticipated length of disruption
- Flushing schedules
- Significant action taken by Board or MWU leadership
- Construction projects – impact on traffic and service
- Plan or report completion – when projects such as a master plan, strategic plan or infrastructure plan have been completed

STAKEHOLDERS

1. Highly impacted residents
2. Highly impacted businesses
3. Neighborhood association leaders
4. Madison residents at large
5. Madison Media
6. City Council
7. Utility Personnel
8. Regulators
9. Water commissioners
10. Scientific community

MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

Tone

- Not defensive or adversarial (willing to accept criticism and feedback)
- Working together with the community (sympathetic to their concerns) will increase the speed/accuracy with which messages are disseminated

- Committed to water quality (our number one concern), including setting standards beyond regulatory requirements
- Willing to listen and change (trying to improve), as is the norm in a learning organization
- Utility is here to serve the citizens of Madison (we don't know everything)
- Committed to open, honest communication (a two-way process)

Content

- MWU is accountable/responsible to the public
- MWU has heard/will continue to hear your concerns and we are taking action
- MWU takes full responsibility for not communicating well in the past. The utility is committed to improving.
- Use of lay terms for full understanding of the issues.

Credibility

- Employ services of outside experts to provide independent assessment on water quality issues
- The board clearly demonstrates its oversight responsibilities of the Utility. **CHANNELS**

Utility Staff

- By keeping MWU employees well informed on a regular basis, more of the right messages will reach the public and staff are more likely to buy into changes at the utility.

Water Quality Report

- Currently published annually. Add quarterly electronic version disseminated via website and email. Direct stakeholders to it through PSAs, newspaper advertising, and media outlets.

Annual Report

- Publish a comprehensive MWU Annual Report that addresses overall organizational issues, including financial performance, water quality and communication. Report would be published electronically via the Utility website with limited number of paper copies available on request.

Neighborhood Associations

- Forge solid working relationships with Neighborhood Associations to better understand what is going on in the neighborhoods, acquire valuable feedback, and utilize existing communications channels. Identify key association contacts. Set regular check-in schedule via telephone and in-person meetings.
- Associations need to be at the core of grassroots effort to get to know people personally in the neighborhoods, to better understand their concerns and issues, and put a more human face on utility leadership. Relationship needs to be one of partnership so that trust will build over time.

Public Meetings

- Open, honest dialogue in a non-scripted environment. Data from previous meetings show that these are effective in educating the public and improving understanding of key issues.
- Length of presentation and complexity of information is crucial. Use of lay terminology is important. Tone of presentation needs to be one of open dialogue and willingness to accept feedback and input.

Board Meetings

- Use the opportunity to better clarify what the Board does and how its decisions impact stakeholders. Make it clear that these meetings are open to the public.
- Post the agenda on the MWU website.
- Broadcast meetings on Cable 12.

Newsletters

- Issue education and management on a regular (monthly) basis electronically.

Local Media

- Forge close working relationship with local reporters so that there is a better understanding of MWU. Be proactive in feeding information.
- Meet with Editorial Boards at least once a year.
- Work with electronic media on best ways to issue emergency alerts.

E-Mail Alerts

- Timely updates on water quality and related issues on a monthly and event-driven basis. Continue to offer residents and others the opportunity to join the list serve.

Direct Mail

- Use post cards to residents (currently in use).

Outbound Phone Calls

- Alert key stakeholders when something important is happening (similar to warning calls issued to businesses when water main flushing is going to impact them, e.g. laundromats).

Signage

- Project signs explaining work that is taking place and who to contact at MWU.
- Signs posted (similar to water main flushing signs) so stakeholders passing by know what is happening on a work site.

Community/Cable Television

- Disseminate information via cable and community TV outlets.
- Coverage of Board by channel 12 (cable access TV)

Radio/Television

- Enhance use of Public Service Announcements (PSAs), both local and national in origin.

Website

- Continue with improvements to the MWU website to enhance two-way communication.

Multiple Languages

- Reach out to audiences in multiple languages as appropriate.
- Work with Neighborhood Associations to better understand specific language needs in a particular geographic area.

Paid Advertising

- Place water quality information, water main flushing updates, meeting notices in appropriate media.
- Consider a larger public outreach campaign to enhance overall image of MWU to increase awareness and re-establish credibility.

Community Relations

- Review/enhance current community, educational outreach programs. MWU currently participates in Sustain Dane Rain Barrels program.
- Build goodwill for the future via event sponsorship, charitable tie-ins, and community participation.

Drinking Water Summit

- Madison hosts a national summit on drinking water, attracting leading experts from around the country, positioning MWU as a national leader. Consider partnering with AWWA and WEF.

Experts List

- Establish a list of subject matter experts within the Utility who are available to interact with the public, media, schools, and neighborhoods on topics of interest.

Other

- DNR website (repository of test results)
- CDC website (link to pertinent information on water-related health issues)
- Explore reverse 911 system (has potential in the event of health emergency).
- Establish a speakers bureau in the utility to speak at local business associations, service clubs, schools and other events
- Relationship with Sustain Dane
- Establish relationships with private/public healthcare providers.
- Establish relationships with private/public schools.
- Effective tie-in with City of Madison disaster planning
- Establish customer accounts manager (major accounts) for more personal relationship.

Influencers

- Identify individuals in the community MWU can work with, especially to increase outreach to all communities.

Communications Trigger and Action Matrix

	High-profile Well Developments	Siting new wells	Health concerns	All test results	Change in well status	Potential Financial Main breaks	Flushing	Board actions	Construction Projects	Plan or report Completion	Website developments New Staff	Program additions	Malfunctions, detection of	Cluster of customer	
Website	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
E-mail List Serve	x		x	x	x		x				x		x	x	
Local reporters	x	x	x		x	x	o	x	o	o	x	x	o	x	x
Editorial boards			x			x		x				x			
Public meetings	X	x	x			o		x	x		x		o		
Neighborhood Associations	x	x	x			o		x	x		x		o		
Water Board Meetings	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x
Newsletters (quarterly)															
Internal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X		
External	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X		
Direct Mail	o		X/o												
Signs							x	x		x					
Bill Stuffers		x								x			X		
Utility Staff	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Community Relations		x								x			x		
Community TV													x		
Radio PSAs															
Print ads								x							
Radio ads								x							
TV ads															
Billboards															
Annual Report															
Water Quality Report			x	x									x		o
Outbound Calls								x							o
Mass telephoning			o				o								

X=must do 0=Optional, depending on situation

PROCESS

Single Point of Information (Consistency)

- Develop a protocol that identifies the team that needs to respond to and communicate about a water issue.
- Shape the message internally, agree on content, disseminate.
- Eliminate conflicting information.
- Eliminate backtracking on previous information.
- Issue news releases from City, if necessary, to incorporate MWU and Public Health.

Preparation

- Spokesperson needs to have all of the facts available. If not, must follow up in a timely fashion once facts are known to earn credibility.

Education & Training

- Education and training for MWU staff on public communication tools and techniques to improve the way information is disseminated and ensure management is more comfortable dealing with its public communication responsibilities.
- Regular training to stay in tune with current best practices.

Proactive Stance

- Forge good working relationships with media, neighborhood associations, and other stakeholders so that communication/motivation is clearly understood by all involved.

MEASUREMENT

Continued surveying and feedback as change takes place to evaluate impact of communication efforts and adjust as necessary. Response to specific efforts can be measured but overall impact on community relations is the most important aspect.

TIMELINES

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- Develop an annual calendar for community relations opportunities and assign responsibility for each activity.

NEXT STEPS

- Initiate hiring process for dedicated communications person.
- Present plan to board to gain formal.
- Write SOP to formalize and provide system-wide guidance.
- Establish review mechanism to determine success and course correction.

- Develop protocol for response team.
- Ensure that the internal communications design team develops a parallel communication plan.

BUDGETS

As the 2008 budget is developed, each communication tactic should be reviewed for an allocation. 2007 activities can be tracked to develop sound estimates for future years.