



# Valuing Water's True Worth

November 8 2013 9:05 AM

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How many times do you use water, directly or indirectly in a given day? Ten? Twenty? More? You've probably never thought about it. Yet, you've come to expect the quality and reliability that our nation's water systems provide and that make our way of life possible. When asked, most Americans would say they care about water; they certainly depend on it. But do they value it? It's a question not of semantics, but one that relates to the future of water in this country.

To value something means to understand its worth, its importance. Historically, Americans have undervalued water, thanks to effective systems that have brought safe, drinking water to homes and businesses, and for fire protection, but also because of a lack of awareness of the challenges facing our water infrastructure. In fact, a survey by Xylem Inc. in 2012 showed that 90 percent of Americans considered water an important service, on par with heat and electricity. Yet 69 percent said they took clean water for granted and less than 30 percent believed water infrastructure problems would affect them "a great deal."

It's an issue the Value of Water Coalition, a partnership involving the leading organizations responsible for ensuring the safety, reliability and sustainability of the country's water, is aiming to resolve in its public education campaign that launched nationwide last month. I am proud to say Illinois American Water is one of the many public and private organizations that for the first time have joined together as a single, united voice, in pursuit of a common goal: to help people throughout the U.S. understand that the nation's water systems are in need of significant investment to maintain the safety and performance levels we rely on, and that while our efforts have been successful, continuing as we always have is no longer sustainable.

There's even more at stake. Just as people depend on clean and safe water, so does the entire U.S. economy. In its newly-released *Importance of Water to the U.S. Economy*

report, the EPA highlights the fact that every sector of the U.S. economy is either directly or indirectly dependent on the output of industries that rely on water, especially energy and food production, and water supply, which rely nearly 100 percent on the nation's water resources. From industries ranging from manufacturing to tourism, any drop in water supply or heightened competition for use will significantly impact economic development for the entire country. Changes in even just one sector or region can produce ripple effects across the whole economic system. Once again, awareness -- in this case, of water's true worth to our national economic welfare -- is key.

Indeed, investing in water infrastructure pays off -- in good-paying jobs to repair, replace and upgrade our aging water systems, which in turn will ensure safe and reliable water to attract and retain business and qualified workers, essential to creating healthy communities and keeps the U.S. competitive.

Backed by such efforts as the Value of Water Coalition and the EPA report, we in the water industry need customers to understand what's at stake and what they would be getting in return. These education efforts are essential to the process, so that we can start making these investments now in order to ensure a clean, safe, and reliable supply of water for our children and all of our futures. And they will become increasingly important as demands on water resources, such as population growth and the impact of climate change, strain water supplies.

While the challenges we face are significant, they are not insurmountable. In fact, they can be viewed as drivers of the support necessary to institute real, and much-needed, change. The *Importance of Water to the U.S. Economy* report underscores the fact that decision-makers in both the public and private sections will need robust data and information tools to help them sustainably reduce risk and manage the nation's precious water resources, and foster the economic and social welfare benefits they provide.

Ultimately, it comes down to gaining awareness of water's true worth in all our daily lives. We depend on it to cook and clean. It is an essential component for a vital economy and environment, not to mention health and fire safety. We need it to exist. What other resource delivers that much?

## **ABOUT ILLINOIS AMERICAN WATER**

*Illinois American Water, a subsidiary of American Water (NYSE: AWK), is the largest investor-owned water utility in the state, providing high-quality and reliable water and /or wastewater services to approximately 1.2 million people. American Water also operates a customer service center in Alton and a quality control and research laboratory in Belleville.*

*Founded in 1886, American Water is the largest publicly traded U.S. water and wastewater utility company. With headquarters in Voorhees, N.J., the company employs more than 6,700 dedicated professionals who provide drinking water, wastewater and other related services to approximately 14 million people in more than 30 states, as well as parts of Canada. More information can be found by visiting [www.amwater.com](http://www.amwater.com).*