

# Keeping Safe Drinking Water Flowing

By Jim Siriano, Department of Environmental Conservation

When we turn on a tap in our home or business, we expect safe water to flow from the pipe. And for most Vermonters it does, thanks to our municipal drinking water systems - systems that are vital to the health, safety, and economies of our communities.

But we should not take safe water for granted. Feeling pressure to keep rates low, many communities have not been making the investments needed to properly maintain, repair, rehabilitate, and replace their assets. So more pumps, pipes, and water treatment plants are failing or will likely fail soon. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that Vermont needs to invest more than \$510 million in public drinking water infrastructure in the next twenty years to ensure the health, security, and economic well-being of our communities ([Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Surveys and Assessment, Fifth Report to Congress, April, 2013](#)).

Municipalities face significant challenges as they try to manage and replace aging infrastructure while continuing to meet their customers' expectations.



*Leaking underground pipes are only some of the challenges faced by municipal water system operators.*

An Asset Management Program can help meet these challenges. An effective program uses detailed asset inventories, risk assessments, life-cycle cost analyses, and financial planning to set priorities and meet level of service goals in a cost-effective manner. It can help systems operate more efficiently, prolong

asset life, plan and pay for future repairs and replacements, and make informed decisions.

To help municipalities develop a program, the state's Drinking Water Capacity Program is hosting two Asset Management Workshop Series, one in Montpelier and the other in Rutland. Heather Himmelberger – a nationally renowned Asset Management expert – is leading the workshops. The series began in September and consist of four full-day workshops spread over a ten week period. Under Ms. Himmelberger's guidance, participants are creating an Asset Management Program to help solve a problem with their drinking water utility. One municipality, for example, is developing a program to reduce the impacts of breaks on distribution mains serving downtown. Between each workshop, the participants will complete portions of the Asset Management Program to help address their problem. By the end of the series they will have developed a program for part of their system, and have the knowledge and confidence to expand it to include the entire utility.

Although the workshops focus on drinking water utilities, towns can use Asset Management Programs for other infrastructure, too, including wastewater, stormwater, and roads. These programs can also help towns qualify for financial incentives through the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, and to develop the Fiscal Sustainability Plans required when borrowing money from the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Program.

*The Drinking Water Capacity and State Revolving Fund Programs will be offering grants to help municipalities develop an Asset Management Program for their drinking water utility. Details regarding the grants and a request for applications will be sent to all public community drinking water systems in the coming weeks. Please contact Jim Siriano at (802) 585-4889 or [jim.siriano@vermont.gov](mailto:jim.siriano@vermont.gov) if you have questions regarding the grants or Asset Management Programs.*