

## Taking Care of Business: Water System Upkeep and Repair

Imagine living in the middle of a parched and barren landscape with little or no access to fresh, clean water. Life as we know it and live it today would be impossible.

One hundred years ago, Teddy Roosevelt was president, the population of Las Vegas, Nevada was 30 and the maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 miles per hour.

Here in the Indian Wells Valley, the earliest white settlers were beginning to dig wells and install pipes in order to pump and distribute water throughout their land holdings. But digging water wells was an expensive proposition and not guaranteed to be successful. So as more folks relocated to the Valley, they either created partnerships to develop new wells or joined small water companies already in place.

This activity comprised the first wave of local water facilities construction. A second similar building surge occurred here after the Navy established its Ordnance Test Center in 1943, swelling Valley population from 152 to over 2,700 by 1944, with about 9,000 more civilian and military personnel expected to follow shortly.

In order to keep pace with this growth, private water companies already in existence here had to dig more wells and add to storage and piping infrastructure. Interestingly, this cycle of growth was echoed throughout the nation during the so-called Post-War Boom Era.

The Indian Wells Valley Water District was incorporated in 1955 and, over the ensuing years, purchased or merged with a number of small water companies throughout the Valley. A similar process took place with regard to the formation of public water utilities across America as people began to move into regions that had previously been sparsely populated.

There are currently more than 800,000 miles of water pipe in the U.S. according to the nation's General Accounting Office (GAC). They also report that the vast majority of our nation's water distribution and treatment networks are at or near replacement age. In fact, having surveyed many systems where upkeep has been admittedly spotty or even nonexistent, the GAC estimates that up to 20 percent of conveyed water is lost through leakage.

The consensus is that drinking water utilities across America must plan to invest up to \$1 trillion over the next three decades for necessary capital improvements, remedial upkeep and replacement, or so predicts the Environmental Protection Agency and the Congressional Budget Office.

The Indian Wells Valley Water District has practiced an aggressive maintenance and replacement program for decades, encompassing mainlines and distribution piping as

well as valves and all manner of structural facilities. It should be noted that this concerted effort has been ongoing over and above efforts to increase water delivery capacity that had to match our spiraling population numbers.

As our system has expanded, necessary upkeep and repair efforts expanded too, especially in the areas of construction materials costs and man hours. Over the past five years alone, the price of construction-related products has soared. And the expense of transporting them to this rather remote area has also gone up dramatically, reflecting higher fuel costs.

Water affects every aspect of the quality of life. For example, the availability of clean water is crucial to public health. Clean water is also essential to help sustain new people arriving to take new jobs - supporting a growing economy. But our gains could all be compromised by failing to maintain, replace and enhance our local water system.

When you turn on a tap and water runs out, you probably take it for granted, along with the invisible infrastructure that makes this process possible. Out of sight out of mind, in a way.

But our ability to continue to provide clean, safe, affordable water to our customers for the foreseeable future and decades to come is our most important mission. It's the reason we're in business.

Which is why it's imperative to for us to continue to take care of business day in and day out, 24/7.