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A Message from the Chairmen (From the 2008 Spring Newsletter)

Many mayors will agree that the federal clean and safe water legislation has, over the last four decades, provided local government with an action-framework that has been effective in achieving dramatic improvement in the quality of water in our streams, lakes, estuaries and our water supplies. These remarkable gains have come at remarkable cost—some \$82 billion/yr spent by local government on water and sewer. In our Democratic society we rise to such costly commitments by sharing the expense at the community level, and sometimes we get a small but important contribution from our state and federal government. The spending continues to increase by an average of about 5 percent per year. What we can proudly report to our citizens is: public water in America is the safest drinking water in the world; and, it has the best consumer value possible at \$1.50 to \$3.50 per thousand gallons. Where else can you get a better buy for your money?

Although the nation's water quality has vastly improved there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to protect and preserve these resources. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has focused primarily on establishing and enforcing requirements to eliminate or mitigate point sources of pollution (discharges from pipes) involving Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs- or, sewer systems) and industrial plants and processes during the first 15 years of the modern Clean Water Act (1972-1987). EPA has documented improvements to water quality, but has also reported continued water quality impairment from “nonpoint” sources (NPS) of pollution. Today, NPS pollution has become “the” major threat to our water resources. A 2002 EPA report indicates urban runoff contributes: 13 percent of impairment to rivers and streams; 18 percent of impairment to lakes, ponds and reservoirs; and, 32 percent of impairment to estuaries. While urban runoff may not be the single largest contributor to impairment it is certainly one of the major (and usually larger) categories.

It is clear that the EPA cannot successfully address the issue without the concerted efforts of local government. Cities are well positioned to take action because urban runoff is within our jurisdictions. This is usually not the case with agriculture, forestry and mining- the other major categories of NPS pollution.

This Mayors Water Council Newsletter is devoted to the “best practices” that cities are implementing to mitigate the urban runoff problem. We have assembled articles from cities around the nation to provide a profile of what types of actions and programs cities are involved with. We have also invited the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to articulate their point of view on the subject. Their article is interesting in that they see a reasonable opportunity for mayors across the country to team with them by using their logistical information to help focus local efforts to maximize water resource protection. The articles also provide good testimony to the growing popularity of low impact development and incorporation of green infrastructure approaches. This topic will be included in the October 1-2, 2008 Mayors Water Summit Agenda in Palm Beach, Florida.