

21st Century Water Municipal Issues and Concerns: Literature Review

Ten years into the 21st Century, municipal and county leaders are facing significant water challenges, including: high water use rates, population growth, aging infrastructure, and the impact of climate change. Currently, the U.S.'s water infrastructure discharges more than 2 billion gallons of untreated combined sewer overflows and leaks an estimated 7 billion gallons of clean drinking water out of distribution pipes each day (U.S. EPA, 2004; ASCE, 2009). With federal funds for water infrastructure increasingly scarce, the economic burden for infrastructure improvements falls on local governments, who, even before the recession, struggled to ensure adequate funding for operating and maintaining water systems.

These challenges are no longer contained within the traditional confines of water "issues" but are intertwined with energy, development, infrastructure, and overall issues of sustainability. Faced with the convergence of inadequate infrastructure that needs a large economic investment, persistently low water quality, and the anticipated impacts of climate change, municipalities have begun considering alternative water infrastructure investments.

The following literature review provides information on the most urgent water issues of the coming century, as identified by WERF, and a discussion of the materials available to guide officials, regulators, and managers in the use of low impact development and green infrastructure to address these issues.

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