

Do I have a water leak or a revenue leak?

By Randy Hellbusch, Circuit Rider

NeRWA conducts many water leak audits annually. Often times leaks are found that were not surfacing or were not detected for some reason. There are times when no leaks are found. Often times when the water system contacts us, they will explain that they are losing a large percentage of the water they are producing, pumping, buying etc. A good rule of thumb is to start looking for a leak when 15% or more of the water produced is unaccounted for.

This is where good recordkeeping is essential. A month or two of records may not tell the story. Even a year's worth of records may not be adequate. The past few years we have seen major changes in weather patterns. 5 or 6 years ago we were having drought issues and water consumption was quite high. The past couple of years have been quite the opposite. Many systems are seeing revenue short falls due to wet weather and low water consumption. If the water system has good records of water sold vs. water produced, it makes it much easier to determine what may be causing the leak or if there is a leak at all. Thus the question: Do I have a water leak or a revenue leak?

If water sold figures are down and production seems to be staying fairly steady, it may be a meter issue. Then we need to look at the billing statistics. Is there perhaps a large user whose bill has been down recently? Often times it is beneficial to first look at the larger meters in the system. With good records it is possible to see exactly when the problem started. If the gap is increasing gradually, it may be that old meters throughout the system are the culprit. AWWA recommends that residential meters be checked every 10 yrs. or 1.5 million gals. Water meters are the system's cash register. If a business person suspected that his cash register was cheating him, how long do you think it would take him to get it replaced? It is essential that water systems are being run like a business. Costs are constantly increasing for running small water systems due to regulations, fuel, electricity, etc. If you suspect you may have a water leak or a revenue leak give NeRWA a call and we will be glad to assist you.