

Meters are a Must

By Randy J. Hellbusch, Circuit Rider

Everyone that is involved in the industry of safe drinking water these days is no doubt aware that our industry is changing at a tremendous rate. Many of these changes are unfortunately quite costly and demand that water systems keep a very close eye on their budget. Several small water systems around the state still charge a flat rate for water. Upcoming costly regulations and the simple fact that many systems are simply becoming quite old and have not been updated are causing many systems to take a good look at their water rates. Systems that are charging a flat rate are finding that they are forced to double or in some cases triple the rate just to meet their annual budget. This often means that a single person living alone is paying around \$35 to \$45 a month for water, the same as a family of six with perhaps a large lawn and garden. This, of course, is not a fair practice, just as it is not fair for the family of six to pay the same as a business or industry that uses far more water than the family does.

The mention of water meters seems to inflict the fear that everyone's water bill is going to be raised. This is definitely not the case. In many instances a majority of customers will see a decline in the amount that they are paying for water. Compare a flat water rate with simply installing one electric meter on the edge of town and everyone divides the bill equally. Very few residents would be willing to do this I am sure.

Systems that have installed water meters have found that water consumption had been reduced drastically, an average of 50%. This is a tremendous asset in reducing the systems annual budget which of course has a direct effect on everyone's water bill.

I recently assisted a community in Western Nebraska considering major water improvements and considering meters as a part of the project. This system has 639 connections. Currently all users pay a flat fee of \$38.23 with a handful of users paying more due to estimated water use. This generates \$339,182.00 annually. A metered rate to generate the same revenue would be \$27.00 + \$1.75/1,000 gals. This means any users averaging less than 6,000 gals. per month would be paying less (\$35.75 for 5,000 gals.) Approximately 370 of the current 639 users would be paying less with a metered rate than they are now. This is assuming they sell only 45% of what they are now pumping! Meters are truly the only fair and equitable means for a water system to generate adequate revenues.