

What a Free Internet Subscription Could Cost Your Water System

By Russ Topp, Circuit Rider

Over the last few years I have had several calls from water operators concerning communication providers wanting to install antennas on their water towers. Water towers are very inviting to these companies because it saves the cost of erecting their own tower. Typically it is wireless internet providers or cell phone companies wanting to provide service to the village and surrounding area. It could also be the rural fire department or law enforcement agency wanting to install antennas or repeaters on the water tower.

Installing these antennas on the tower can provide the community with a valuable service. Most communities are in need of better cell service or high speed internet service and most village board members are all in favor of getting a free internet subscription for the village or fire department, but is a free subscription really worth the potential cost?

At least once every five years the water tower will need to be inspected and cleaned if necessary. The tower contractor will have to comply with OSHA regulations. There could be cables draped over the balcony that could cause a trip hazard. Cables strapped to the ladder may pose a potential hazard and may not be OSHA compliant. Sooner or later the tank will need to be painted. If the cables are not secured properly and out of the way, they will need to be moved prior to the contractor performing the work. Who will be responsible to move the cables and what will it cost? If brackets for the antennas need to be welded to the tank there may be damage to the paint. If the interior coating of the tank is damaged the tank will need to be drained and the coating repaired or rust will start and cause expensive repairs later. Will the company need to house

electronics under the water tower? If a leak occurs and sprays on the electronics will the village be responsible to replace them?

Security will also be a concern. All water towers should have some type of security device on or around them. If a service technician needs to access the secure area what will the protocol be for them to access the tower? Will the water operator need to be present while the work is being done?

Safety is always a concern when someone needs to climb the tower. If there would happen to be an accident while someone was on the tower, would the village insurance cover them or could this lead to legal action against the village?

Before signing a contract with anyone wanting to install antennas on your water tower you may want to consider what the long term costs may be for the village and what the liabilities could be.