

# Computers Are Another Tool In The Operators Toolbox

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The time has come, it is here and now! Water and Wastewater Operators, DPW, and Highway Superintendents need computers, or daily access to computers, to perform their jobs efficiently and at the level of professionalism that is expected of them.

For many years I have listened to Mayors, Supervisors, Clerks, and Board Members offer up excuses as to why DPW and Utility personnel should not be allowed to have computers with Internet access. Many municipalities have denied personnel access to computers without Internet access. I have even been to municipalities where the Clerks do not have, or choose not to have computers. Fortunately for all of us this concept is finally crumbling under the advance of time.



The computers of today allow all of us to be more efficient and professional in our everyday jobs. The software that is available today for word processing can make anyone write like an Author and spell like a champ. Spreadsheets give us the ability to create concise and accurate reports that calculate formulas and total daily, monthly, and annual data with ease.

I cannot begin to tell you how disheartening it is to sit at a village board meeting and try to decipher a DPW or WTP / WWTP operators report that has been scratched out on a yellow legal pad. I reluctantly give a little leeway to some men and women within our ranks whom for the test of time, or the lack of education, have failed to master even basic computer skills. I can also flip this argument over to the trustees and board members that hold the purse strings. Many of these officials have not, for whatever reason, taken the time or effort to become computer literate. Some fight the advance of technology with a vengeance, making it more difficult to introduce technology to some positions. On a positive note, I have personally seen the smiles on board member's faces when clean, concise, and nicely printed reports are presented to them at board meetings. Many board members will comment in the minutes as to how well a report was written and are appreciative of the effort required.

I have also noted the difficulties that older professional engineers (P.E.) have with giving accurate and informative presentations to decision makers without the aid of data projectors and PowerPoint presentations.

Many of these engineers farm out the AutoCAD and Water Cad modeling work, or just plain do the calculations and drawings the old way. As the era of computer aided drawing advances many of these professionals will also be faced with the fact that many of the newer and younger board members will expect presentations incorporating available technology.

There also used to be an argument that computers were costly and unreliable. These myths have also fallen with time. I guess you do not have to think back very far to remember our world without computers. When I came to work for the NYRWA in 1996 our field staff did not have computers. We kept our daily logs on paper, and copiers and FAX machines were the marvels of the day. We eventually were issued laptops, crude machines that were heavy and lacked useful battery life. The logs were kept in a DOS program that was difficult to master and no two log reports printed the same. We have gone through the progression of the Windows family (3.1, 95, 98, 2000, XP) and now one of our staff has an operating system called VISTA. The progression was not without pain and we all suffered a bit. I came from a background that was not really a part of the technology revolution, but I somehow could see it coming. My wife and I purchased our first desktop around 1987, it was an IBM with a 60mgz processor. We were amazed at what it was capable of, but had no idea how it all worked.

I was watching a television show the other day and they were interviewing the crew of the first lunar landing. Neil Armstrong, who piloted the Lunar Excursion Module (LEM), remarked that the onboard computer that guided the LEM to the surface of the moon had less computing power than the average palm-sized scientific calculator used in high school math classes. As technology continues to march into the future, should not everyone be on board?

In closing this article, I would like to add that our municipal personnel of today really need Internet access. There are so many reasons (tools, ideas, articles, information, parts, vendors) it would be difficult to list them all. The good, as always, will overshadow the bad. Lets give our utilities here in New York the tools they need to become the best anywhere. ♦