

Standardizing



Over the years I've spent as a distribution operator, I have come to the understanding that less is very often more. What am I talking about? Standardization of system components. How often have you visited a neighboring system (usually in the middle of the night, on a holiday, and or in sub-zero

weather) attempting to locate that oddball sized repair clamp, long out of production hydrant part or to ask, "have you ever had one of these apart"? Times like these will make you reconsider that early retirement incentive!

So, what can we do to reduce these situations? Well, obviously we cannot simply change out our entire system, no, that is out of the question. There are things that can be done as a step toward helping us actually see changes take place during our lifetime. One of the simplest things to do is to "officially" standardize various components of the water system. Standardization seems to be a widely overlooked practice, perhaps many believe it simply isn't legal, or for whatever the reason, impractical.

First, let's address the legal issue. For a privately owned system, this may be as simple as drawing up a policy of acceptable equipment. For a municipal system, it takes a bit more legal effort, but can still be accomplished through the adoption of legal standards. I made contact with Donna M.C. Giliberto, General Counsel to The New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials. Those of you that were in attendance at our Annual Technical Conference in Saratoga this year, would remember Donna as the one that spoke to a standing room only crowd, on the topic of "Legal Issues for Water and Wastewater". I would like to thank Donna for taking time out of her busy schedule to help us out with this article.

I have attached a small portion of the legal terminology that Donna sent to me. Please keep in mind the information provided here is put forth simply as a guide to make you aware of legal options available to you, you should not make any changes to your code until first obtaining direction from your system's own legal council.

Use of Brand Names in Specifications/Standardization

Brand name products may be specified to the exclusion of others if the governing board has adopted a proper standardization resolution. General Municipal Law, 103(5) provides that, upon the adoption of a resolution by at least 3/5 vote, stating that, for reasons of efficiency or economy, there is a need for standardization, a political subdivision or district may award purchase contracts for a

particular type or kind of equipment, materials or supplies. The resolution must contain a full explanation of the reasons for its adoption. Upon the adoption of a proper standardization resolution, a municipality may provide in its specifications for a particular make or brand to the exclusion of all other competitors (1990 Opns St Comp No. 90-45, p 101; see also General Building Contractors v City of Syracuse, 40 AD2d 584, 334NYS2d730 mod on other grnds 32NY2d 780,344NYS2d 961; Hodge & Hammond v Burns, 23 Misc 2d 318, 202 NYS2d133; Memorandum of the State Education Dept., L1957, ch 984, McKinney's Session Laws of 1957, p 2197;1982 Opns St Comp No. 82-44, p 57). It is doubtful that a resolution standardizing on a particular brand solely because of the subjective preference of a local official, or because in the opinion of local officials a particular make is more economical, better built or more durable than other makes, would be sufficient. Rather, the resolution should recite why by objective facts, efficiency or economy will be served (1990 Opns St Comp No. 90-45, p 101; 1958 Opns St Comp No. 58-484, unreported)

The adoption of a standardization resolution, by itself, does not eliminate the necessity for compliance with the competitive bidding requirements (but see discussion of sole source, supra). Thus, although the make or brand of an item may be stated in the specifications, anyone who can furnish the item may bid. However, there is no longer a need for the inclusion of an equivalency clause in the specifications

In a nutshell, you can mandate specific equipment, without the equivalency clause. The key is that you must demonstrate efficiency or economy as to the motivation behind the standard. This isn't difficult with the changing technologies of today's components. Let's look, for instance, at water meters. Radio read meters have started to take our industry by storm, and it makes good sense because it can save an incredible amount of time in reading and billing, as well as, providing the system with the ability to read the entire system's meters daily. The technology behind this powerful tool requires in many cases, that the meter reader and clerk receive multiple hours of training to become acquainted with the interface equipment, programming procedures and software. To then throw in the mix another brand, another software, another interface and programming, can really bog down efficiency through confusion.

Lets look at whether or not it's practical to standardize. This example is a personal favorite of mine, fire hydrants. Have you ever noticed how some systems will have a mix of hydrants, including possibly five different brands, and endless sizes? In most cases, if you look closely, you will find that each brand is grouped into a segment of history, a bracket

of time. This comes from changing management, making choices as to which brand and size they determined to be the best. There is nothing wrong with wanting what you believe to be the best. The problem arises when you have to have a warehouse sized supply of parts to match the endless number of brands and sizes that you now must maintain. Let's not even mention the special tools and training needed to maintain each brand.

I am a big believer in simplification as a means toward economy and efficiency, but we must approach these standardization policies with some temperament. When making the decision as to what will be best for your system, some considerations need to be made. In something such as water meters we need to give thought to what technology will best serve our needs and meet our goals for the next 20 years.

Regarding something such as hydrants, these durable items can easily last for many decades, (I know of one, still in faithful service, for well over a century). Something that you may want to ask yourself is, will parts still be available in the future for the equipment I choose? We must also consider, what does the bulk of my system have now? If our system has 200 hydrants and 170 of them are brand X, while 30 of them are brand Y (and you like brand Y), it may not be efficient or economical to standardize to brand Y! Sometimes we need to face a reality in our system that we may not like,

and as a friend and operator once told me, "I gotta dance with the one that brung me".

We are at the time of year that lends itself well to sitting down in a warm office, thinking through what our standards will be and drawing up these policies or resolutions for adoption. You can even look at this time as an investment, as standardization will dictate to future developers and engineers, just what components will be installed, without argument!

I have only touched on a couple of system components, but this standardization can move into many directions for us. Keep in mind that we must be moving toward efficiency and/or economy, which are the things that every good operator should have as part of his daily and long-term goals. ♠