

# UNDERGROUND

## Time to Reinvest in Water Infrastructure

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Looking over data from our annual State of the Industry Report, it's clear that the state of our water infrastructure—and the costs associated with replacing it—continues to occupy the central seat of concern among water utility leaders.

Much of the drinking water infrastructure was constructed during three periods: the late 1880s, the roaring 1920s, and the post-World War II boom. Due to differences in materials and construction methods, many thousands of miles of underground water pipe are concurrently reaching the end of their functional lifespan. In many communities, pipes are fail-



ing with increasing frequency, resulting in traffic tie-ups, business interruptions or worse. The price of inaction is enormous, because the longer a community waits, the higher the price tag for the citizens who finally pay the replacement tab.

Unfortunately, as one utility manager in the Southeast wrote in the 2007 State of the Industry report: "The attitude in a lot of places is to patch it, and it will last until next year."

We are at a turning point North America's infrastructure. While the cost of repairing and replacing the water infrastructure is immense—estimated at over \$250 billion over the next couple decades—communities must confront the problem with courage and resolve. Water utilities and local governments

must take action now to ensure that today's problem does not become tomorrow's crisis.

Without question, a compromised water infrastructure system will jeopardize our ability to provide safe, high-quality drinking water. Any measure of a successful society—low mortality rates, economic growth and diversity, productivity, and public safety—are in some way related to access to safe water.

We must remember that investing in our water infrastructure has never been more important for communities across North America. We are all stewards of the water infrastructure and resources handed down to us by past generations. And it is now our responsibility to ensure a safe water supply for future generations to enjoy. ■