



## Management Issues

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Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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## Management Issues

**Reference Number:** MTAS-1389

Responsibility for the utility system lies ultimately with the city's governing body. Therefore, city officials need to have at least a basic understanding of utility operations. The governing body has several important roles. It:

- sets policies, procedures, and guidelines for the utility operation;
- hires and maintains a competent, well-trained staff; and
- provides the resources for the staff to carry out the utility's functions.

Every city utility system should have a policies and procedures manual that contains the utility's rules and regulations. Employees should be expected to follow the policies and procedures as established by the governing body. This makes the employees' job much easier as they have clear guidelines to follow when dealing with customers and making daily decisions regarding utility operations. The manual also lets city officials hold employees accountable for those rules. The policies and procedures will need to be updated and modified from time to time as the operations of the utilities and state and federal laws change. Policies should also be set for water and sewer line extensions. These policies should address how new developments will be served and how new lines are to be funded. This helps ensure that extensions are handled in a fair and uniform process.

One of the challenges for management is staffing. Utility managers should have the expertise to oversee the operation and be able to work closely with city officials to help them understand the needs of the system. Utility personnel should be expected to read and interpret new regulations. Training opportunities must be provided so that staff can maintain high levels of operation and maintenance. And, officials should expect the utility management to be accountable for the operation of the water and sewer system. Likewise, management should hold staff members responsible for the work that they do. A wage, salary, and benefit plan should be put in place that is equitable and provides a means to retain competent staff. Utilities can obtain surveys through MTAS, development districts, and other organizations that can help them put together their plan.

City officials are ultimately responsible for the financial situation of the water and sewer system. They must set the rates, borrow the monies, and authorize the budgets. Management staff and officials must work together closely to ensure that resources are provided for the operation, maintenance, and expansion of the system.

## Water and Sewer System Security

**Reference Number:** MTAS-846

Water and sewer systems are complex and vast operations and are open to possible terrorists attack. Much of the water and sewer system is open and cannot be totally shielded from vandalism or destruction. However, there are steps that can be taken to minimize the danger and to deal with any situations that arise.

The greatest threat to water and sewer systems, is likely from someone who is local, instead of an international terrorist group. Almost every city utility system has someone who is a disgruntled customer or ex-employee. These people may seek to damage the system in such a way as to render it difficult to provide water or treat wastewater. For example, they may destroy the power supply to the water plant making it impossible to treat and pump water. It is not likely that a substance could be introduced into the water supply that would injure or kill vast numbers of people, but many other activities could be done to damage the system. Water and sewer systems have many potentially dangerous chemicals, such as chlorine, stored on site. Also, as previously mentioned, they could choose to damage the treatment plant, pumping stations, or water storage tanks. Cities could be without water or sewer service for hours, days, or even weeks. At the greatest extreme, a terrorist could simply kill the certified and trained personnel leaving the system with no qualified operators.

Water and sewer systems should take every step to mitigate this threat. First and foremost, cities should have planning and preparation in place to deal with an event should it occur. A plan should

be developed that involves not only the utility staff, but also local law enforcement, fire, rescue, medical, and any other emergency staff that would be a part of the plan. If everyone knows their contacts and roles in an emergency it will be much easier to deal with a crisis than trying to pull this together when working under the stress of an event. Another important part of mitigating the threat is taking preventive steps now. Locking facilities and limiting access to the system is important. Cameras and alarms may be installed where appropriate. Screening personnel as part of the hiring process may prevent the disgruntled employee or ex-employee. Making utility personnel responsible for being alert to potential threats is vital. For example, personnel should always question anyone they see around the facilities to determine if they are present for legitimate purposes, and they should report any unusual activity. And, utility staff should take seriously any threat made by anyone. Sometimes it's easy to brush off the local who has been disgruntled with the utility for years. But this may be the one time he is ready to act.

Hopefully no utility will ever have to face a terrorist action. If plans and preparations are in place the situation will go much smoother and the remedy much quicker. MTAS consultants are available to assist you with more detailed information on security measures and help you evaluate your current situation.

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