

Study Highlights Efficiencies in Water Works Operation

A recent study commissioned by West Des Moines Water Works and Des Moines Water Works revealed that while WDMWW already operates efficiently, the two water works may be able to find some minor cost savings by working together.

Veenstra & Kimm Inc., which conducted the review for the two utilities and authored *The Joint Study on Collaboration Opportunities*, identified a few areas for potential cost savings for each utility.

- Chemical purchases
- Lime residual disposal
- Meter reading
- Lab testing



West Des Moines Water Works Treatment Plant

that the two utilities are structurally very different. West Des Moines relies primarily on ground water sources (a combination of deep and shallow wells) and acquires 25 to 40 percent of its water supply from Des Moines Water Works, depending on the year. In turn,

Des Moines Water Works relies on surface water sources including the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, and it sells more than half of the water it produces to users outside the city of Des Moines.

“We have enjoyed a long and productive relationship with Des Moines Water Works, and we learned more about each other as a result of this

study,” said Karen Novak Swalwell, chair of the West Des Moines Water Works Board of Trustees. “This was a valuable exercise and the report confirmed that we already do several things very efficiently and effectively.”

The report estimated that the total savings to West Des Moines Water Works could be \$63,000 annually,

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STUDY FOUND WDMWW ALREADY HAS COMPARATIVELY LOWER COSTS IN MANY AREAS

The study examined 15 areas of common activity including the purchase of chemicals, billing, customer service, dispatch services, maintenance, leak detection and treatment plant operation.

In addressing the board of trustees of West Des Moines Water Works, H. Robert Veenstra Jr. noted

It’s Baaack: Go Paperless and Get \$5

Keeping costs low is a continuing quest. That’s why West Des Moines Water Works is once again offering a \$5 incentive to customers who switch to completely paperless billing and payment.

“Sign up in May and June, and we will give you a one-time \$5-rebate on your monthly West Des Moines municipal services bill,” says Bill Garrett, acting general manager. “About 21 percent of our customers have gone completely paperless, and our immediate objective is to raise that to 40 percent in the next two years.”

If half of the users would opt for paperless billing, the savings would be nearly \$79,000 a year.

NO MORE PAPER BILLS, ENVELOPES OR STAMPS

Customers who choose paperless billing will no longer receive their water bills through the mail, but rather be notified by e-mail that their municipal service bills are ready for viewing. Naturally, bills can still be printed from home computers or filed electronically, whichever works best. Individual customer bills remain available online for up to 24 months.

Water Works will continue to offer traditional billing, so if customers try paperless and later decide they don’t like it, they can always revert to paper.

REGISTER WITH 4 EASY STEPS

To register for your paperless account, go to www.wdmww.com and follow these easy steps: (Have your account number available.)

1. Click on the “View and pay municipal services bill” on the top left.
2. The “Welcome-Please Log in or Register” screen will appear.
3. Select “Click here” to register and fill in the requested information. Check the box for “Online Bill Delivery” to receive a notification e-mail.
4. To complete the registration, you must respond to the confirmation e-mail within 7 days.



DID YOU KNOW



More than 4,800 WDM water customers have opted to go paperless, thereby saving annually:

- 1,600 pounds of paper
- 6,000 pounds of wood
- 7,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions

That's like:

- driving 7,100 fewer miles
- saving 358 gallons of gas
- planting 89 trees, growing them for 10 years

Source:

payitgreen.org/green-footprint-calculator

WDM Water Works Focused on Preventing Leaks and Problems

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with as much as \$60,000 resulting from buying certain chemicals together. Des Moines Water Works could save about \$2,000 buying soda ash at the same rate as West Des Moines Water Works.

West Des Moines could trim some costs for Des Moines as well. For example, WDMWW may be able to help Des Moines Water Works with meter readings, which now cost that utility more than \$18,000 a year.

"Both utilities have a stated goal of operating as cost-effectively as possible," noted **Bill Garrett**, acting general manager. "While the potential cost-savings identified in the study do represent some savings, they are not enough to significantly impact water rates."

DIFFERENT STRUCTURES; DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The study revealed that WDMWW is already operating as efficiently or more so in areas such as billing, dispatch, customer service, leak detection and maintenance. The report noted that in many cases, the structural and size differences of the two utilities made it difficult to detect collaborative opportunities. For example, in the distribution system—the network of pipes and mains—West Des Moines Water Works av-

erages 20 main breaks a year while Des Moines Water Works averages 300.

"This difference is not entirely unexpected. Over the past 20 years the West Des Moines Water Works has replaced significant portions of its older cast iron water main located in the area east of 35th Street," according to the report. Much of West Des Moines' distribution system is newer on average than that of Des Moines. "The lower number of main breaks allows the West Des Moines Water Works to focus more ... on preventative activities, such as flushing, valve maintenance and hydrant maintenance."

The study also considered the optimization of treatment plants. While West Des Moines Water Works may be able to get its entire supply of water from Des Moines in non-peak usage months, the study noted: "...it appears unlikely the West Des Moines Water Works could experience a savings from intermittent operation of its treatment plant."

Gretchen Tegeler, a West Des Moines Water Works trustee, asked for the staff to evaluate the potential areas of collaboration identified in the study. Garrett said staff would report back to the Board of Trustees at a future meeting.

'Drought-Free' is the Verdict After Spring of Snow and Rain

The winter that wouldn't go away finally did, and with it went the drought in Central Iowa and much of the state.

"Most of Iowa is drought free," says **David Miskus**, senior meteorologist with the Climate Prediction Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington, D.C.

Miskus says the drought was considered "over" in the eastern half of Iowa by the third week in April, with the areas of the state categorized as in drought "shrinking westward."

The NOAA's U.S. Drought Monitor shows that areas of Iowa classified as D1 (moderate drought) to D4 (exceptional drought) has decreased from 100 percent at the beginning of the year to 36 percent by April 25.

As damp and chilly as spring has been, the unrelenting cold did a favor for Central Iowa, which lies downstream from the snow that was dumped on the Upper Midwest this year. Miskus says Central

Iowa is "lucky it's been colder than normal so that it slowed the snow melt," allowing the water to soak into the ground rather than running off into the streams and rivers. So far, Central Iowa has staved off problem flooding.

Central Iowa, including West Des Moines, is at 150 percent of normal precipitation for the last six months, and most of that precipitation has occurred February through April, Miskus notes.

The week ending April 24 was the wettest week the state has seen since June 2010 (2.9 inches, compared with normal of .78), according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Topsoil and subsoil moisture levels have improved greatly in recent weeks. In Central Iowa, topsoil is rated 98 percent adequate or surplus and subsoil is rated 71 percent adequate or surplus, according to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Statewide, topsoil is rated 91 percent adequate or surplus and subsoil is rated 54 percent adequate or surplus, due to the continuing drought conditions in far Western Iowa.



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