



Need System Upgrade

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Woodsville has been operating its water system now for 15 years. The older 19th-century homes have been restored and are now on the area walking tour, bringing tourists into the town's businesses. The mobile home park has been slowly replacing old trailers with new mobile homes and has planted trees and landscaping now that water is available for a sprinkler system. The nursing home expanded as expected and the improved housing in the community has allowed them to attract new employees. The food processing plant hasn't relocated yet

and they are now talking to Woodsville officials about access to the water system. Even with careful maintenance, water system components wear out and need replacement. Advancing technology also introduces new and improved ways to treat and deliver water to customers. Also, changes in federal and state regulations require water systems to upgrade to improve the safety and reliability of the water supply.

There are two choices.

Adequate Reserve Funds Exist

The superintendent and operator do their research to estimate the cost of the needed upgrade. Because of careful budgeting, the community has adequate funds on hand to upgrade the system without raising water rates.

Not Enough Reserve Funds Exist

After researching the cost of the needed upgrade, the superintendent and operator estimate that the cost will exceed the funds on hand.

Form Construction Management Team (pay \$100)

The superintendent, operator, water board members, and a facilities director at a local company work with the consultant as a team to develop strategies for a system upgrade.

Hire Consultant (pay \$5,000)

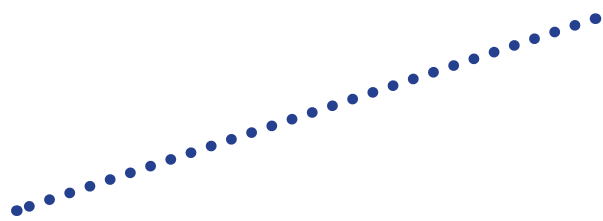
To design the details of the needed upgrade, a consultant is retained.

#3 Read #3—Management and operations staff and outside consultants work together to develop a plan for upgrade. Notice of upgrade plans raises a few calls of concern that are handled at public meetings. Water system continues to operate and send out consumer confidence reports. Repeat OPERATION until you NEED SYSTEM UPGRADE (go to NEED FINANCING when necessary).

#2 Read #2—Water system staff came up with an easy, inexpensive way to upgrade system. Since they were never included in discussions with outside consultant, they got mad and took jobs at a water plant in another town. Without water system operators, upgrade could not be completed. Return to NEED SYSTEM UPGRADE.

Evaluate Rate Structure (pay \$200)

Since the customers ultimately pay for any water system upgrades, the rate structure should be examined and adjusted. Make sure that the rates are equitable, and that the highest water users are paying their fare share.



Continue Community Involvement Process (pay \$200)

A representative from the water board, a local elected official, a residential customer, a commercial customer, the superintendent, and the operator form a committee to discuss the needed upgrade, costs, and how to adjust water rates to cover the costs. They also contact a technical assistance provider to gather information on grants available for upgrades. A strategy is developed to present the case to the customers.



Raise Rates Following Budget Briefing with Next Water Billing (pay \$500)

An explanation of the needed upgrade and costs, along with the impact on water rates is presented to the customers. While some complain, most appreciate being informed.



Form Construction Management Team (pay \$100)

The superintendent, operator, water board member, and a facilities director at a local company work with the consultant to develop strategies for a system upgrade.



Raise Rates

Based on the evaluation of the rate structure, the decision was made to raise water rates with the next bill.

#1

Read #1—Rates are raised without notice. Work on the needed upgrade results in the streets being torn up. Complaints arise and many refuse to pay higher bills. Lack of cooperation from residents results in delays and increased costs. Upgrade not completed. System fined for not meeting new water quality requirements. GAME OVER.

#3

Read #3—Management and operations staff and outside consultants work together to develop plan for upgrade. Notice of rate increase and/or upgrade plans raises a few calls of concern that are handled at public meetings. Water system continues to operate and send out consumer confidence reports. Repeat OPERATION until you NEED SYSTEM UPGRADE (go to NEED FINANCING when necessary).

Lessons Learned

Customers pay for upgrades; be prepared to raise water rates and save for predictable upgrades.

Continue to inform and involve the community in the upgrading of a water system. The community involvement process that works so well when a new system is being developed is critical to the successful implementation of upgrades.

Be sure to include water system staff and community resource people in planning upgrades. Often they can pull together local force labor and borrow equipment and/or expertise to keep upgrade costs low.

This game never ends. Once you start out on the water system game, your community is committed forever.

High quality water at a reasonable price is now available to all Woodsville residents and businesses. As a result, property values have risen and public health has improved. The population and businesses in the town are stable. Woodsville continues to operate and upgrade its water system for 50 years. The food processor closed, so the community was grateful that it did not try to overextend its water service. The water tower continues to be a focal point in the community and the bricks sold to fund the water plant remind the residents of the forethought and commitment to its leaders. The town council is re-elected.