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Water Infrastructure: Extension's Role in Advancing Community Dialogue

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Abstract:

'Liquid Assets: The Story of our Water Infrastructure' made its public broadcasting debut in Fall 2008 (www.liquidassets.psu.edu). This 90-minute documentary presents case studies from across the nation that illustrate the complex issues about water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, protecting water resources, and the financial and technical solutions that communities must seek to resolve the problems associated with aging- and increasingly inadequate community systems. While stations nationwide plan to air the documentary in the coming months and year, there remain enormous gaps in community understanding for the growing challenge of ensuring water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure at the local level that will enable communities to grow, sustain, and flourish -from a public health standpoint as well as economic and environmental protection ones. Extension has a unique opportunity to address this gap in water-based education.

Penn State Cooperative Extension serves as the lead outreach partner for the purpose of advancing the infrastructure dialogue in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, release of the Liquid Assets documentary coincides with the imminent October 2008 report of Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell's Sustainable Water Infrastructure Task Force - detailing the infrastructure challenges and solutions forecasted for Pennsylvania. Extension, in cooperation with its outreach partners -state NGOs, state, regional, and local governments, and watershed organizations, seeks to best use the timely release of Liquid Assets to engage communities in exploring infrastructure deficiencies and options for addressing the enormous challenge of ensuring safe, efficient, and reliant water and wastewater systems. This session will introduce Liquid Assets as an outreach tool - with particular emphasis on the community toolkit and opportunities for local-, regional- and state level programming based on Pennsylvania's experience. Participants in this session will receive a copy of the DVD which includes the documentary, chapters, and the community toolkit, along with information about Extension-led infrastructure outreach underway in Pennsylvania.

Impact Statement:

Penn State Cooperative Extension was identified by Public Broadcasting to take the lead on water and wastewater infrastructure outreach on a statewide basis and in conjunction with the release of 'Liquid Assets: The Story of Our water Infrastructure'. Beginning in December 2007, Extension cultivated state and regional level partnerships with other organizations dedicated to outreach related to water resources including:

- Water Resources Education Network
- Pennsylvania Chapter of American Water Resources Association
- PA DEP, Division of Technical and Financial Assistance, Bureau of Water Standards and Facility Regulation; State Water Planning Office
- PA DEP Chesapeake Bay Office
- Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs
- 10,000 Friends of PA
- Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association
- PA Chapters of the American Society of Civil Engineers (Pittsburgh, Central PA, Lehigh Valley, Philadelphia)

-PA Municipal Authorities Association

-PA Rural Water Association

With these partners, Extension has sought to develop local and regional programming to complement broadcast of Liquid Assets with panel discussions, Q&A, and identification of local or unique issues of concern for communities to address related to their own infrastructure challenges. With a wide area of rural communities reliant on private home well and septic systems, some communities questioned the relevance of the issues raised in Liquid Assets. In fact, private home systems are more often experiencing the same or more rapid rate of failures to protect drinking water standards or local natural resources from contamination. Pennsylvania's outreach efforts have resulted in the increased awareness that water and wastewater infrastructure inadequacies at very large and at very small scales is often similar and that private, home systems also have the challenges that are associated with the larger systems. The question of scale became a relevant discussion.

Category: Other Water Resource Topics

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation