



*Local governments working together for a better metropolitan region*

January 16, 2009

District of Columbia  
Bladensburg\*  
Bowie  
College Park  
Frederick  
Frederick County  
Gaithersburg  
Greenbelt  
Montgomery County  
Prince George's County  
Rockville  
Takoma Park  
Alexandria  
Arlington County  
Fairfax  
Fairfax County  
Falls Church  
Loudoun County  
Manassas  
Manassas Park  
Prince William County

\*Adjunct member

Dalton Delan  
Executive Vice President and Chief Programming Officer  
WETA-TV  
2775 South Quincy Street  
Arlington, VA 22206

Dear Mr. Delan:

I serve as the Chair of the Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee (CBPC) of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), the principal policy advisor to the COG Board on regional water resources issues. COG is the regional association of 21 local governments, state legislative officials, and members of Congress. The COG region covers more than 3000 square miles and is the home to 5 million people surrounding the Nation's Capital.

A truly critical issue of our time is the need to repair our aging water and wastewater infrastructure. This is the subject of a well-crafted documentary, "Liquid Assets," which was produced by Mid-Atlantic Emmy award winning Penn State Public Broadcasting and distributed through the National Education Television Association. WETA is to be congratulated on having broadcast "Liquid Assets" last fall. I urge you to give it prominent airtime again in the near future in the interest of the health and safety of the citizens of the Washington region. To get a sense of the scale of the issue, consider that the customers of Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, which serves most of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, have suffered more than 4,000 breaks and leaks in the last two years. And the trend is upward.

Our water and wastewater systems provide the capacity to fight fires, supply potable water to homes and businesses and carry away and treat our domestic waste. Water is essential for operating hospitals, running numerous businesses and industrial companies including electricity as well as the major data hubs that are critical to our region. While often taken for granted, our water and wastewater systems suffer from decades of deferred maintenance and sometimes provide us with a rude reminder of that neglect. A few weeks ago, a catastrophic rupture of a major water line in Montgomery County, Maryland made national and international news. River Road flooded; drivers in cars were trapped; only the heroic efforts of public safety personnel prevented serious injury or loss of life.

While such dramatic breaks are thankfully infrequent, smaller scale water line breaks and sewage overflows from sewer lines occur with distressing frequency. A Google search of "water main break" produced nearly half a million hits; "sewage overflow" produced over fifty thousand. Each occurrence has adverse public health, public safety or environmental health implications. It's a huge problem that has been greatly neglected.

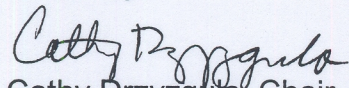
The cost of repair is very large. Public understanding of and support for the history, engineering challenges, and economic realities of this essential infrastructure is critical. "Liquid Assets" does an excellent job of making these complex issues understandable. You can make a tangible contribution to enhancing public understanding of this issue by airing this timely and important documentary, preferably several times, over the next several months.

Again, WETA deserves recognition for having shown the film in late 2008. Airing it several more times while the River Road event is still fresh in the public's mind will help reinforce the scope and importance of the problem. It is especially relevant in this region as executives of two of the region's utilities, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission are featured.

I'd also like to suggest that WETA consider producing a community forum or panel discussion focusing on the condition of the water and wastewater infrastructure in this region. If that's something you would consider, COG would be willing to provide assistance.

I hope you will give this request serious consideration. The issue is critical and will only get worse as time goes on. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact Stuart Freudberg, COG's Director of Environmental Programs, at (202) 962-3340.

Sincerely,



Cathy Drzyzgula, Chair  
Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee