

The Water-Coffee Nexus

If the “Value of Water” concept is falling on complacent ears, reminding people of their love of coffee might more effectively grab their attention, illustrating the importance of sustainable water and reliable infrastructure.

BY IAN MACLEOD

Wait. Did I read that correctly? Yes. Lately, much has been written about the nexus between water and energy. Its core message is that when we conserve water, our collective carbon footprint is reduced. But what about the water-coffee nexus? Am I suggesting that we drink less coffee to conserve more water? Absolutely not. I'm enjoying an espresso as I write this article.

However, as water industry leaders blog, present, and create infographics to call attention to our woeful water infrastructure, I quietly wonder if anyone is really listening. Do people understand the real value of water?

That's where the water-coffee nexus comes into play. If people aren't thinking much about water, watch what happens when they don't have access to their morning coffee! According to the National Coffee Association, more than 50% of Americans drink brewed coffee daily and, on average, 3.1 cups per day. Another 30 million adults drink espresso-based specialty brews daily. That's more than 480 million cups of coffee per day, equating to nearly 32 million gallons of water per day (or 11.5 billion gallons annually) consumed by Americans in the form of coffee.

Big numbers. And a big upset at offices, police stations, hospitals and neighborhood cafés if there's a main break.

If the “Value of Water” concept is falling on complacent ears, reminding people of their love of coffee might more effectively grab their attention, illustrating the importance of sustainable water and reliable infrastructure.

One Montana-based social entrepreneur is embracing the water-coffee nexus to raise awareness. She started the premium coffee site InfrastructureBrew.com in 2017 on the premise that a portion of coffee sales be donated to the Community Engineering Corps, a cause that focuses on repairing critical infrastructures located throughout the U.S. through its alliance partners, including the American Society of Civil Engineers, the American Water Works Association, and Engineers Without Borders USA. Infrastructure Brew is a company helping to remind everyone of the coffee-water-infrastructure nexus with every cup.

Much of our nation's infrastructure exists aboveground, making it easier to see it, inspect it, and witness its slow decay. But when it's buried deep beneath the ground, it's out of sight

and all-too-often out of mind.

Recent estimates state that \$4.8 trillion needs to be invested in water infrastructure over the next twenty years to maintain a state of good repair. Modern water treatment and distribution infrastructure and operational systems have made the gift of water so easy that we've forgotten the complex magic behind those precious drops that readily flow from our faucets. How then do we keep water and sewer infrastructure in the conversation?

In America today, a water main breaks every two minutes. Subsequent repair and maintenance activities present opportunities for water utilities to engage the public about the challenges related to aging infrastructure.

The recent Infrastructure Week (May 14-21, 2018) featured educational opportunities and advocacy that brought together American businesses, workers, elected leaders, and everyday citizens around one message: “The Future Won't Wait. Neither Can We. It's #TimeToBuild.”

It shined a spotlight on all infrastructure including roads, bridges, rail, ports, airports, water and sewer systems, the energy grid, telecommunication, and more (although I can't say for sure that coffee-water infrastructure was addressed).

At the 2018 Texas Water conference, the largest regional water conference in the United States, an entire afternoon was dedicated to discussing the value of water. There are over 30 leaders from various sectors of the water industry connected to the Value of Water Campaign's Imagine a Day Without Water, a national day of awareness in October focused on communicating the value of water.

As I take my last sip of coffee, I'm grateful our water main made it through another day and the reservoir was full. **WW**



About the Author: Ian MacLeod is vice president of marketing for Master Meter Inc.

To learn more, visit mastermeter.com.

Circle No. 247 on Reader Service Card