

GUEST COLUMN

Not hard to imagine a month without water

By JENNIFER PEDERSON

In recent weeks, two major events have captured national attention: the devastating hurricane that ravaged the mountains of Appalachia and the brief but impactful dockworkers' strike along the East Coast. Though vastly different, both incidents underscore a common truth: the vital importance of our national water supplies and the critical infrastructure that sustains them.

Oct. 17 marks the 10th anniversary of Imagine a Day Without Water, a day dedicated to raising awareness about something many of us take for granted — reliable access to clean, safe drinking water. It's a day to pause and reflect on how essential water is to our lives, health, and the American economy.

For many Americans, however, imagining a day without water is not just a thought exercise — it's reality. In the aftermath of the Appalachian hurricane, estimates suggest that areas near Asheville, North Carolina, could be without functional drinking water systems for a month or longer. Some areas face even more prolonged outages.

Ask yourself, how long could you go without water? This Imagine a Day Without Water, we urge you to take a closer look at what it takes to bring water from its source to your tap.

Water doesn't just flow out of a faucet by magic. It travels through miles of pipes beneath our feet, pipes that can be easily destroyed when roads are washed away. Most water systems rely on pressurization, powered by pumps that need electricity to function. Water treatment itself is an energy-intensive process. When the power grid goes down, so do our water systems. Temporary solutions like generators are helpful, but no generator is large enough to power an entire water system for an extended period. Simply put, no power

means no water.

Behind the scenes, public water systems are operated 24/7 by dedicated men and women — trained, licensed professionals responsible for ensuring the water you drink meets stringent state and federal regulations. These individuals don't just worry about natural disasters. They are also tasked with meeting evolving regulations to protect public health, such as those targeting the removal of lead pipes.

In the coming months, you may hear more about the dangers of lead in drinking water. Notices will be sent to homes with lead pipes and areas where water systems lack precise records of whether lead pipes are present. This is due to changes in the Environmental Protection Agency's Lead and Copper Rule, which now

requires water systems to inventory every water line in their service area, including those that aren't directly under their control.

Lead lines were installed decades ago, long before the dangers of lead exposure, especially to children, were fully understood. Although progress has been made, the task of removing lead lines nationwide is monumental and costly. Until recently, there was little to no federal funding available to help. Now, the federal government is implementing an ambitious goal: to eliminate all lead service lines in the next 10 years. We ask for your support in helping public water systems achieve this vital objective.

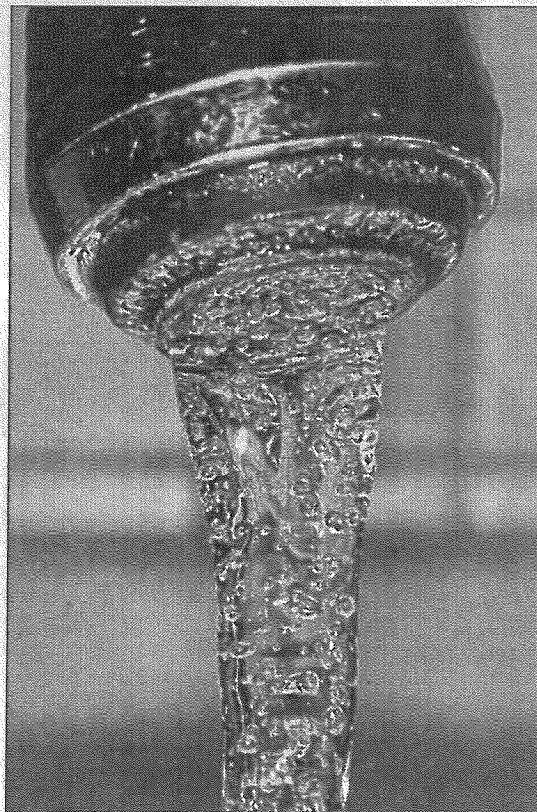
While we tackle the challenges of natural disasters, regulatory demands, and funding shortages, we face another critical issue: a shortage of skilled workers. Water operators, like plumbers, electricians, and dockworkers, are essential to keeping the American economy running, yet their work often goes unnoticed.

The average age of water operators is rising, and fewer young people are entering the profession. We must elevate the status of these unsung heroes to attract the next generation of public servants. After all, there is no greater public good than ensuring access to clean water.

Throughout history, civilizations have thrived only where there is access to plentiful, reliable water. In modern America, our hospitals, factories, and office buildings all depend on it. As the recent dockworkers' strike made us imagine the economic consequences of prolonged supply chain disruptions, I ask you to imagine the economic devastation of unreliable water.

No operators, no water. No water, no prosperity.

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