

# Great Water Cities Share 'Rock Star' Secrets

Describing the leaders in the water sector as “rock stars,” Water Environment Federation President Ed McCormick introduced the Great Water Cities event at WEFTEC® on Monday morning. Under the topic, “The Impact of Leadership: Culture, Communication and Community in Great Water Cities,” this year’s presentation and panel represented the latest iteration in a series of critical conversations that started at WEFTEC 2011.

The stage was set by Stan Meiburg, acting deputy administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Drawing on his broad professional experience, Meiburg related his observations of Atlanta’s 2002–2010 Mayor Shirley Franklin to illustrate the “power of leadership” in water and water treatment issues.



“We can draw attention to a problem,” he said. “But real change requires the kind of commitment and communication with the public that Mayor Franklin displayed, and that many city, state, and tribal leaders all across the country have displayed.”

Against that backdrop, he highlighted a number of “challenges and opportunities our nation faces now in providing clean and safe water,” how EPA is playing a role, and the crucial role that cities will continue to play in these issues.

One of the representative challenges involved infrastructure financing, and issues resulting from EPA estimates that the U.S. will need more than \$600 billion in water infrastructure improvements over the next 20 years.

As part of the EPA response to future challenges, Meiburg used the WEFTEC venue to unveil a new tool designed “to help local officials decide how green infrastructure can work for your communities.” Dubbed “Green Infrastructure Wizard,” the new self-guiding tool is available online and allows exploration of EPA resources available at the local level.

The subsequent panel discussion, moderated by David St. Pierre, executive director of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, highlighted some of the approaches being taken by international industry leaders in addressing the challenges of today and tomorrow.

One of the broad themes that surfaced in several presentations involved movement toward a holistic picture of the water cycle through a merger of drinking and wastewater responsibilities, with one example provided by Lars Schroeder, CEO of Denmark’s Aarhus Water Ltd. and another drought-related example offered by Felicia Marcus, Chair of California’s State Water Resources Control Board.

“The cultures of the water and sewer organizations are very similar,” concurred Tony Parrott, executive director of Louisville’s Metropolitan Sewer District, pointing to similarities in both organizational approaches and public understanding of day-to-day operations.

Further expanding on the potential synergies, Susan Story, president and CEO of American Water, highlighted what she termed the “water-energy nexus,” and expanding applications for things like “intelligent water grids.”