



AwwaRF Hosts First Congressional Briefing on Climate Change

Congressional Briefing Overview

The Awwa Research Foundation (AwwaRF) conducted its first briefing for Congressional members and their staff, committee representatives and the news media November 7, 2007, on how climate change is anticipated to affect the quality and quantity of the public's drinking water supply. The briefing, which drew more than 30 congressional office representatives and news media, is a major step toward educating Congress on the critical role the Foundation's research plays in our country.

By explaining how the Foundation is researching topics of high interest such as climate change, and by showing how subscribers are applying the research, the Foundation hopes to demonstrate that AwwaRF's work is central to maintaining the quality and quantity of the nation's drinking water. Developing a higher profile with Congress as part of a larger communications strategy intended to reverse a recent trend in decreased federal funding for research from Congress.

The briefing included a panel of speakers moderated by AwwaRF Executive Director Robert Renner. The panel was comprised of AwwaRF Board Chair David Rager, Director of the Cincinnati Water Works; Patricia Mulroy, General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority and the Las Vegas Valley Water District; and AwwaRF Research Director Christopher Rayburn.

Congressional members represented included staff from Senators Murray, Tester, Durbin, Brown, Reid and McCaskill' offices. From the House, staff members attended for Representatives Porter, DeGette, Lewis, Miller, Matheson, Conaway, McCollum, Welch, Sanchez, Udall, Berkley, Johnson, Sanchez and Blumenauer.

Other attendees included representatives for the Energy and Commerce Committee, Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Commission. Several media members also attended including reporters from Scripps Howard News Service, *Inside EPA*, *The Las Vegas Review Journal* and Greenwire Energy and Environmental Policy News.

Summary of Key Information Presented at the Briefing

Rob Renner provided an overview of AwwaRF, explaining the mission and major funding sources, including the reliance on member organizations' subscription fees as well as federal funding. Renner described the critical need for federal funding and support.

Renner also outlined the Foundation's contribution to the water community including the practical applications of AwwaRF research, published research reports, Foundation-sponsored conferences and workshops, and subscriber support. Renner highlighted current hot topics under study by AwwaRF — climate change, emerging contaminants and treatment technologies, distribution system water quality, asset management, water reuse/desalination and energy management.

Christopher Rayburn presented AwwaRF's findings related to climate change. He explained that a grassroots coalition of water utilities initiated research after they recognized that traditional methods for projecting future water supplies would be inaccurate due to changes in global temperatures.

Water utilities were seeking answers to questions such as: How will climate change our customer's water supply? How can utilities plan for reliable water quality and supplies? How can utilities minimize their contribution to greenhouse emissions? How can utilities effectively communicate with their customers about these issues?

Findings from the AwwaRF-NCAR report *Climate Change and Water Resources: A Primer for Municipal Water Providers* gave water providers a realistic grasp on the nature of the risks posed by climate change. The report defines the current state of climate change research; assesses water supply vulnerabilities; provides case studies of water utilities planning for climate change; summarizes 'lessons learned' from extreme events such as wildfires, droughts and floods; and develops a range of adaptation strategies for water utilities.

Water utilities throughout the United States as well as Europe, Australia and Asia are concerned that extended changes in precipitation will lead (and have already led) to extended droughts, Rayburn noted. Climate change is also generating greater intensity of rainfall, which will increase erosion, flooding and the difficulty of capturing excess water for storage. The timing of precipitation will also affect the reliability of water supplies if too much falls in too short a time. Storage capacity is inadequate for quantities that will be needed for use over longer periods than in the past.

Rayburn described current AwwaRF climate change-related research projects including evaluating effects of climate change on water utility planning and design standards, greenhouse gas emissions inventory guidance and incorporating climate change information in water utility planning. All collaborative utilities and agencies for these current research projects were identified at the briefing. He also outlined next steps including the December 2007 climate change planning workshop and future research projects including climate change impacts on source water quality.

To demonstrate how AwwaRF's research on climate change is being applied by water utilities and explain its regional effects, Board Chair David Rager and Patricia Mulroy, General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), delivered presentations about climate change issues affecting the eastern and southwestern portions

of the United States. In the east, inland areas will experience more intense, less frequent rainfall events. As a result, there will be changes in vegetation and watersheds and degradation of water quality. In coastal regions, water temperatures will increase and associated algae growth will degrade water quality. Rager reported the eastern coastal regions would also see lower reservoir storage and salt water intrusion.

Droughts like those being experienced in the southeast U.S. are predicted for the eastern U.S. as well. So far utilities have seen higher temperatures and a lack of rain from North Carolina to Alabama. This year's hurricane season did not produce any storms with rains to replenish reservoirs. Georgia and North Carolina are considering strong water restrictions and potential states of emergencies.

In the southwest, Patricia Mulroy, SNWA General Manager, explained how declining water levels at Lake Mead — which are seen as a result of climate change — are threatening the two existing water intakes. The third intake will be crucial to servicing SNWA's customers.

Meeting attendees asked how utilities will manage the demand on water resources for people and the environment due to water shortages. Rager responded that there is no choice to make as there must be enough water for both. Mulroy added that even though resource plans have been in place for 50 years, climate change is uncharted territory, pointing to the need for more research to better understand impacts to the ecosystem. The team underscored the need for the federal government to step in as a partner to help further the science and build upon utility-initiated research on climate change. Attendees reported having a better sense of the role AwwaRF plays and the need to advance climate change research.