Creating Water Quality Confidence
Advice Checklist for Utilities

Step 1: Establish Your Water Quality Values

Make sure you articulate the utility's values or commitments related to water quality. Always connect your actions and decision to your commitments when you communicate.

- **Commit to Water Quality Improvement** - People are not inclined to support investment in projects that degrade quality of life or that maintain the status quo. Make it a core value to improve water quality as your knowledge grows.

- **Commit to Increasing Knowledge** - People know that science is not perfect and that things change. They will accept that growth and the expanding use of chemicals impacts source water quality. Telling them there is nothing to worry about won't fly, and is not generally true. Investing in more knowledge is cheap compared to managing conflict and lawsuits.

- **Manage Emerging Contaminants** - Articulate actions or plans that address emerging or new contaminants.

- **Connect Actions with Motivations** - When describing treatment technologies or methods, always include the motivation for employing the method or process. Remind them that the motivations originate from meeting your commitments.

Step 2: Be the Trusted Source of Information

Don't let someone else communicate about important water quality issues before you do. Be meaningful by describing the benefits of your decisions, actions and investments.

- **Communicate How and Why You Test** - Communicate in simple and meaningful terms how much you test the water quality and why. Make sure that your audience knows that you are asking the tough questions and looking for answers.

- **Share Your Emergency Response Plans** - Share your plan for responding to water quality problems. Be proactive in your response to the problem and communications. Working through problems with your community can create more trust than having no problems at all!

- **Articulate Water Quality Risks** - Define the issues and risks that need to be addressed in simple and meaningful terms. Describe the different types of contaminants, where they come from, and why they are a problem. People who are paying attention won't buy that there are no risks.

- **Describe General Treatment Capabilities** - First, let people know that we can make the water as pure as we want to. Describe in simple and meaningful terms the operations of separation, destruction, and disinfection. Being simple, yet meaningful will increase trust. Technical information without meaning erodes trust. For example, relate treatment processes to familiar things - like kidney dialysis or bottled water treatment.

Step 3: Be the Trusted Source of Quality

Regularly remind your audiences that it is your values, diligence, process management, and commitment to investment that create water quality, not the physical source of the water, or regulations. Never refer to regulations as the driver for quality.

- **Put Source Control in the Proper Context** - Managing and improving the quality of source waters should be described as one of many things that the utility does to create high quality water. Putting source control in the context of the entire process of water quality management keeps people from believing that the physical source determines final water quality.

- **Use Multi-Step Purification Processes** - Once people undestand that the source water is unacceptable for drinking, they will want to see a process that puts some distance between the source and the final water product. Communicate how multiple and diverse steps address a broad spectrum of contaminants, create system redundancy, create safety factors, and establish long-term sustainable solutions. Categorize these steps as separation, disinfection, or destruction.

- **Employ Natural Treatment Process When Possible** - Design in or highlight natural treatment processes. Studies and experience show that natural processes increase people's confidence.

- **Use Track Record to Create Confidence** - Scientific data alone is usually ineffective when trying to create confidence. Science and data are not fool proof. Share track record information about your utility and the industry. It helps to have specific examples where you have taken a stand and advocated for improved water quality.