

# Change of Ideas



**W**e are in the midst of a paradigm shift that extends from the average citizen to government institutions. More and more, Americans are focusing on the dichotomy between the need for clean water and functioning sewer systems, and the costs and issues associated with building or updating infrastructure to support those needs—development that potentially can create clean water problems due to runoff.

But development does not need to stop, according to Jeremy Bauer of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Wastewater Management—it just needs to become sustainable. Mentalities of engineers and builders have shifted from getting storm water away from sites, to making site design more environmentally friendly using green approaches such as permeable pavements, rainwater harvesting and bioretention.

The average American also is becoming more aware of water issues, especially in the wake of the past summer's drought, which created drinking water shortages, crippled the farming industry and lifted food prices skyward. According to a survey conducted for the Civil Society Institute (CSI), 89% of Americans believe that "U.S. energy planning and decision making must be made with full knowledge and understanding about the availability of water regionally and locally, and the impact this water use from specific energy choices has on their economies, including agricultural production."

Americans are not so anxious about water and energy availability and the economy, however, that they want to throw environmental caution to the winds. According to the CSI survey, seven out of 10 Americans support a "precautionary principle" approach to addressing water and energy issues. This principle "would advocate a conservative approach to the use of technologies that may put public health at risk and create irreversible environmental harm. If there is not enough scientific evidence showing that it is safe, precaution should guide decisions in those cases."

The EPA is in tune with this national bent toward environmental concern; it will propose rule updates to strengthen its storm water program by June 10, 2013, with final action completed by Dec. 10, 2014. The key elements of the updates include establishing standards for discharges from newly developed and redeveloped sites and requiring some regulated municipal separate storm sewer systems to address discharge from existing sites and retrofits.

As water concerns continue to grow, we need to keep an eye on new technologies to ensure that we stay updated while not harming public health or water sources. Regulatory agencies have a responsibility to the average citizen to enforce rules, and average citizens have a responsibility to each other to protect and conserve clean water in their own small but effective ways.

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