

# Water-Wastewater Ethics

By Donna Kaluzniak

When most people think about water and wastewater, they focus more on the technical side of the business. But ethics is an important factor for all water professionals.

Operators are well trained to know and understand the importance of proper sampling, testing, monitoring and reporting. But some may be pressured by unethical managers or utility owners to falsify results or omit reports of overflow to avoid regulatory fines. Operators may be “discouraged” from reporting equipment breakdowns in order to avoid the cost of replacing equipment.

Some less scrupulous vendors may try to convince utility employees to purchase products by offering “free” trips or gadgets in return for an overpriced order.

Or utility employees may be tempted to use a contractor or vendor because they have an interest in the company.

When pressured or tempted to take a potentially unethical action, one easy way to decide which way to go is to picture a headline in the newspaper. If that causes an uncomfortable feeling, re-think that action.

Another alternative is to discuss the issue (depending on circumstances) with your manager, HR Department, or even a family member or religious counselor.

Many utilities provide ethics training, and ethics courses are required for some industry professionals, like engineers. If your utility or company does not provide this training, suggest or request it from your supervisor.

A lot of ethical issues are not so cut-and-dried as the ones that typically make the news.

When I began writing courses for CEU Plan years ago, I was the Utility Director for the City of Atlantic Beach. I discussed the issue with our City Manager to get his approval and make sure all was above board. He also wanted to ensure we did everything necessary to be ethical, and contacted the City Attorney for advice. The City Attorney recommended I write under a pseudonym so the employees who worked for me would not feel pressured to take my courses.

My courses were written under the name of Annette Vail, and I never disclosed that to my employees. Now that I have retired from the City—I can finally “be me!” I’m now the owner of H2O Writing, and plan to write more courses for CEU plan in the future.