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PMI Stakes Position Advocating Restoration of U.S. Underground Water Infrastructure

Investment required to reduce risks to drinking water and promote water efficiency

Rolling Meadows, Ill. – August 10, 2016 – In the first step of a committed advocacy effort for the safety and sustainability of America's drinking water, Plumbing Manufacturers International (PMI) today introduced a position statement and infographic advocating for the restoration of the United States' underground water infrastructure.

"To help assure the safety and sustainability of our water supplies, the nation must restore an aging, leaky underground water infrastructure that sometimes endangers public health," said Barbara C. Higgens, PMI CEO and executive director. "To realize PMI's vision of 'safe, responsible plumbing – always,' our members believe that we must contribute to the goal of safe water always."

To kick off the advocacy effort, PMI hosted a panel discussion today for members and media. Moderated by Lenora Campos, Ph.D., senior manager, public relations, TOTO USA, the panel included individuals from among some of the organizations that will be partnering with PMI in the advocacy effort:

- Mary Ann Dickinson, president and CEO, Alliance for Water Efficiency
- Abigail Gardner, communications director, Value of Water Coalition and U.S. Water Alliance
- Catherine O'Connor, director of engineering, Metropolitan (Chicago) Water Reclamation District
- Darren T. Olson, senior water resources project manager, Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd., representing the American Society of Civil Engineers
- Rob Zimmerman, director – marketing, projects, specifications and sustainability, Kohler Co.

Drinking water and wastewater systems receive D grades from ASCE

Higgens cited the American Society of Civil Engineers' "Report Card for America's Infrastructure," which gave the U.S. drinking water and wastewater systems D grades, and the ASCE's "Failure to Act: Closing the Infrastructure Investment Gap for America's Economic Future," which states that only 30 percent of America's water and wastewater infrastructure needs between 2016 and 2025 are funded, leaving an investment gap of $105 billion. The Uni-Bell PVC Pipe Association reports 850 water main breaks a day, and the U.S. Geological Survey estimates more than 1.7 trillion gallons of treated water are lost to leaks annually, with 16 percent of treated water never reaching the tap.

According to PMI's water infrastructure Google survey of 1,000 U.S. residents of all ages conducted in July, U.S. citizens are concerned about the aging underground water infrastructure and its potential adverse impact on public health. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents identified drinking water safety as a concerning consequence of an aging underground water infrastructure, and 32 percent identified public officials failing to address water-related issues as a concern. A national poll conducted by the Value of Water Coalition in February found that 95 percent of Americans want public officials to invest in water infrastructure and 60 percent are in favor of paying larger water bills to support this investment.

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PMI has traditionally advocated for water-efficient plumbing products, particularly those certified by the Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program. However, lead-in-water crises in Flint, Mich., and thousands of other American communities – coupled with concerns about waterborne pathogens such as legionella, water main breaks and leaks, drought and their collective impact on water infrastructure – led PMI to begin an advocacy effort focused on water infrastructural issues.

PMI members to continue their history of advocacy

"PMI and its members have always done their part," Higgens stated, citing not only their support of the WaterSense program but also their Flint relief effort and their leadership in the development and passage of the bipartisan Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act. "Our products – toilets, showerheads and faucets – are used at the end-point of the water system and rely on a sustainable supply of clean water. That's what we're going to work with our partners and allies to achieve now – a future of clean, safe and plentiful water."

A second PMI Google survey queried 1,000 Americans of all ages about WaterSense and water-efficiency issues. This survey showed low awareness of the WaterSense program, with 75 percent of the respondents indicating being very unfamiliar or unfamiliar with the program. While 48 percent of respondents felt saving water was important, most survey participants were unfamiliar with WaterSense rebate and incentive programs and didn't feel an urgent need to replace older plumbing products with more efficient ones. This survey is in line with the findings of a 2015 PMI study that found slow adoption of WaterSense toilets, showerheads and faucets, even in parts of the nation affected by drought.

"To reach our goal of clean, safe and plentiful water, we're going to have to educate policymakers and the general public about the importance of a restored national water infrastructure and water-efficient plumbing products," Higgens explained. "We're going to have to convince everyone that the investment is worth it. From PMI's perspective, it's absolutely essential."

PMI is planning further discussion of issues relating to water infrastructure and efficiency at the PMI Annual Conference, Oct. 24-27, at the Westin O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill.

About PMI

Plumbing Manufacturers International is the voluntary, not-for-profit international industry association of manufacturers of plumbing products, serving as the Voice of the Plumbing Industry. Member companies produce 90 percent of the nation's plumbing products and represent more than 150 brands. As part of its mission, PMI advocates for plumbing product performance and innovation contributing to water savings, sustainability, public health and safety, and consumer satisfaction. For information on PMI or its conferences, contact the organization at 1921 Rohlwing Road, Unit G, Rolling Meadows, IL, 60008; tel.: 847-481-5500; fax: 847-481-5501; www.safeplumbing.org.

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