

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

[www.ci.norfolk.ne.us](http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us)

May 2, 2011

## “Drinking Water”



It's as easy as turning a handle to get all the fresh water a person would want to drink and clean with. The Norfolk City Council has proclaimed the week of May 2 as “National Drinking Water Week” recognizing the success of the city's water department in providing continuous safe clean water for the Norfolk community.

Dennis Watts has been with the Norfolk water department for 22 years and has served as director for 15 of those years. He knows the importance of clean water to a community and the challenges of providing it.

“Improvements in our country's health and

prosperity can be attributed to having access to clean safe drinking water. Effective water treatment allows communities to have healthy families and supports industries dependent on clean water,” Watts said.

In 1900 there were about 100 cases of typhoid fever for every 100,000 US citizens. After the community of Jersey City, New Jersey found a way to purify water in 1908, the incidence of typhoid declined to .1 cases per 100,000 people by 2006 and many of those occurred among international travelers.

Americans are apt to take clean water for granted until there is an electrical outage or storms damage water facilities as is the case in tornado ravaged areas in the southern US.

The west water plant located at 300 South 49<sup>th</sup> Street is set up to run on generators during power outages. Last year's Elkhorn River flooding was at the west water plant's back door but because of the design of the wells and plant to resist 100 year floods, Norfolk's clean water supply was never compromised.

Watts said one of the biggest challenges the drinking water industry faces is aging infrastructure.

“We received an award three years ago for having 100 year old ductile iron pipe still in use. Much of our pipe is in great shape but we have some that's 80 to 100 years old that are in need of being replaced,” Watts said noting that aging pipes can crack and increase the risk of water contamination.

### Little known facts:

The City of Norfolk water department is completely supported by customers paying their water bill.

There have never been water restrictions put on the residents of Norfolk.

Many large communities like Lincoln and Omaha clean the water from rivers and provide it as drinking water for their citizens. Norfolk uses water from groundwater wells.

A 700 foot section of water pipe will be replaced this summer at 13<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenue in Norfolk at an estimated cost of \$143,000. Norfolk has about 129 running miles of pipe throughout the city ranging in size from four to 36 inches in diameter.

Another concern for the water department is that the city also has about 1250 fire hydrants, some of which were installed in the 1950's. A recently replaced hydrant cost approximately \$2,000.

Water departments also need to be ready to comply with ever increasing Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations.

"We've never failed an EPA test but they are always proposing stricter regulations that ultimately take money to remedy. I am all for preventing water contamination but I also believe that decreasing the maximum levels of these water pollutants must be based on sound science," Watts said.

Although there are continuing struggles with aging facilities and increased regulations Watts is confident that his department can provide economical safe drinking water to the citizens of Norfolk for many years to come.

For more information see the City of Norfolk Water Department website at <http://ci.norfolk.ne.us/water>.