



**American Water Works  
Association**

*Dedicated to the World's Most Important Resource®*

**ANSI/AWWA G420-17**  
(Revision of ANSI/AWWA G420-09)

**AWWA Management Standard**

# Communication and Customer Relations

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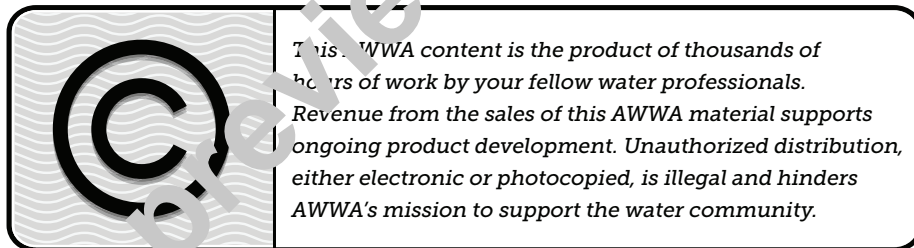
## AWWA Standard

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## Committee Personnel

The AWWA Standards Committee on Communications and Customer Relations System, which reviewed and approved this standard, had the following personnel at the time of approval:

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\* Liaison, nonvoting

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# Contents

*All AWWA standards follow the general format indicated subsequently. Some variations from this format may be found in a particular standard.*

SEC.	PAGE	SEC.	PAGE
<b>Foreword</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
I	vii	4.1	Overall Utility Communication and Customer Relations Plan ..... 3
I.A	vii	4.2	External Communication (Nonemergency and Noncrisis) ... 4
I.B	vii	4.3	Internal Communication (Nonemergency and Noncrisis) ... 6
I.C	vii	4.4	Emergency and Crisis Communication..... 7
II	vii	4.5	Customer Service ..... 9
II.A	vii	4.6	Customer Accounts Management ..... 10
II.A	vii	4.7	Customer Strategy and Satisfaction..... 12
II.A	vii	4.8	Community Education and Involvement ..... 13
III	viii	4.9	Utilizing Social Media for Water and Wastewater Utilities..... 14
III.A	viii	4.10	Internal Customer Service ..... 15
III.B	viii	<b>5</b>	<b>Verification</b>
IV	viii	5.1	Documentation Required..... 16
V	viii	<b>6</b>	<b>Delivery</b> ..... 18
<b>Standard</b>			
<b>1</b>	<b>General</b>		
1.1	1		
1.2	1		
1.3	1		
<b>2</b>	<b>References</b> ..... 2		
<b>3</b>	<b>Definitions</b> ..... 2		

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# Foreword

*This foreword is for information only and is not a part of ANSI\*/AWWA G420.*

## **I. Introduction.**

I.A. *Background.* The AWWA Utility Management Standards Program is designed to serve water, wastewater, and reuse utilities—hereafter, the water sector—and their customers, owners, service providers, and government regulators. The standards developed under the program are generally intended to improve a utility's overall operations and service. One aspect of the standards program is an effort to establish formal management and operations guidelines. These guidelines identify the appropriate practices, procedures, and behaviors, the implementation of which will provide effective and efficient utility operations and contribute to the protection of public health, public safety, and the environment.

AWWA's standards process has been used for more than 70 years to produce American National Standards Institute (ANSI)–approved standards for materials and processes that are used by the water sector. These standards are recognized worldwide and have been adopted by many utilities and organizations. Likewise, this performance standard is developed using the same ANSI–recognized formal process. Volunteer standards committees establish standard practices in a uniform and appropriate format.

Formal standards committees have been and continue to be formed to address the individual standard practices for the diverse areas of water sector operation. A formal standards committee was created in November 2006 to create this standard for communication and customer relations. This standard is the outcome of the Communications and Customer Relations Standards Committee.

I.B. *History.* The first edition was approved by the AWWA Board of Directors on June 14, 2006. This edition was approved on Jan. 14, 2017.

I.C. *Acceptance.* There is no applicable information for this section.

## **II. Special Issues.**

II.A. *Advisory Information on Application of Standards.* This standard includes only those requirements that are limited exclusively to establishing effective communication and public relations for operation and management for a drinking water or wastewater utility. Separate standards adopted by the Standards Program will cover in more detail utility programs such as water treatment plant operation

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\* American National Standards Institute, 25 West 43rd Street, Fourth Floor, New York, NY 10036.

and management, distribution systems operation and management, source water protection, utility management systems, security practices, emergency preparedness, financial management, and other business systems.

**III. Use of This Standard.** It is the responsibility of the user of an AWWA standard to determine that the products and provisions described in that standard are suitable for and compatible with the user's intended application being considered.

III.A. *Options and Alternatives.* It is anticipated that options and alternatives to this standard may be identified during the pilot process.

III.B. *Modification to Standard.* There is no applicable information for this section.

**IV. Major Revisions.**

1. Modified references to “communications” to “communication” throughout document.

2. Updated forms of employee communication as a result of new technologies (Sec. 4.3).

3. Internal Communication section updated to effectively communicate goals (Sec. 4.3.1).

4. Updated requirements around key messages (Sec. 4.3.4).

5. Updated requirements surrounding community advisory (Sec. 4.8.3.2).

**V. Comments.** If you have any comments or questions about this standard, please call AWWA Engineering and Technical Services at 303.794.7711; FAX at 303.795.7603; write to the department at 6666 West Quincy Avenue, Denver, CO 80235-3098; or email at [standards@awwa.org](mailto:standards@awwa.org).



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## Communication and Customer Relations

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### SECTION 1: GENERAL

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#### **Sec. 1.1 Scope**

This standard covers the essential requirements to effectively manage communication and customer relations.

#### **Sec. 1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this standard is to define the minimum requirements for establishing an effective communication and customer relations plan for a water and/or wastewater utility. An effective plan enhances the general public perception of the utility through frequent and focused communication with utility customers and stakeholders. Among the many benefits of a communication and customer relations plan are increased understanding and support of sustainable rate structures; greater tolerance for service interruptions; better cooperation to keep construction projects on schedule; and improved response to customer-billing issues, resulting in timely payment of bills.

#### **Sec. 1.3 Application**

This standard can be referenced in establishing and maintaining an effective communication and customer relations plan for water and/or wastewater utilities. Because each utility's issues, audiences, and organizational structure are unique,

this standard provides broad guidelines. Referencing these guidelines, a utility should thoughtfully and strategically design a communication and customer relations plan that meets the utility's needs.

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## SECTION 2: REFERENCES

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This standard has no applicable information for this section.

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## SECTION 3: DEFINITIONS

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The following definitions shall apply in this standard.

1. *Blog*: A contraction of the term “Web log.” A blog is a Web site with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.

2. *Communication*: The dissemination and exchange of information, ideas, or opinions to better understand, engage, and involve others.

3. *Customer relations*: The contacts, communication, and relationships a utility has with its customers and stakeholders; examples include calls, visits, emails, meetings, or mailings related to services provided by the utility.

4. *Documented procedure*: Within this standard, *documented procedure* means that the procedure is established, documented, implemented, and maintained.

5. *Internal customer*: The utility shall define an internal customer as any employee within an organization for whom another employee provides a service or who has need of a service that other employees provide.

6. *Operations management*: Employees or appointed officials responsible for making decisions that affect the operation of the utility.

7. *Message boards*: A Web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content.

8. *Resources*: Include, but are not limited to, human resources, specialized skills, organizational infrastructure, technology, and financial resources.

9. *Social media*: A broad term that refers to the tools and platforms people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with one another. Social media emphasizes online collaboration and sharing among users, connecting people not just computers.