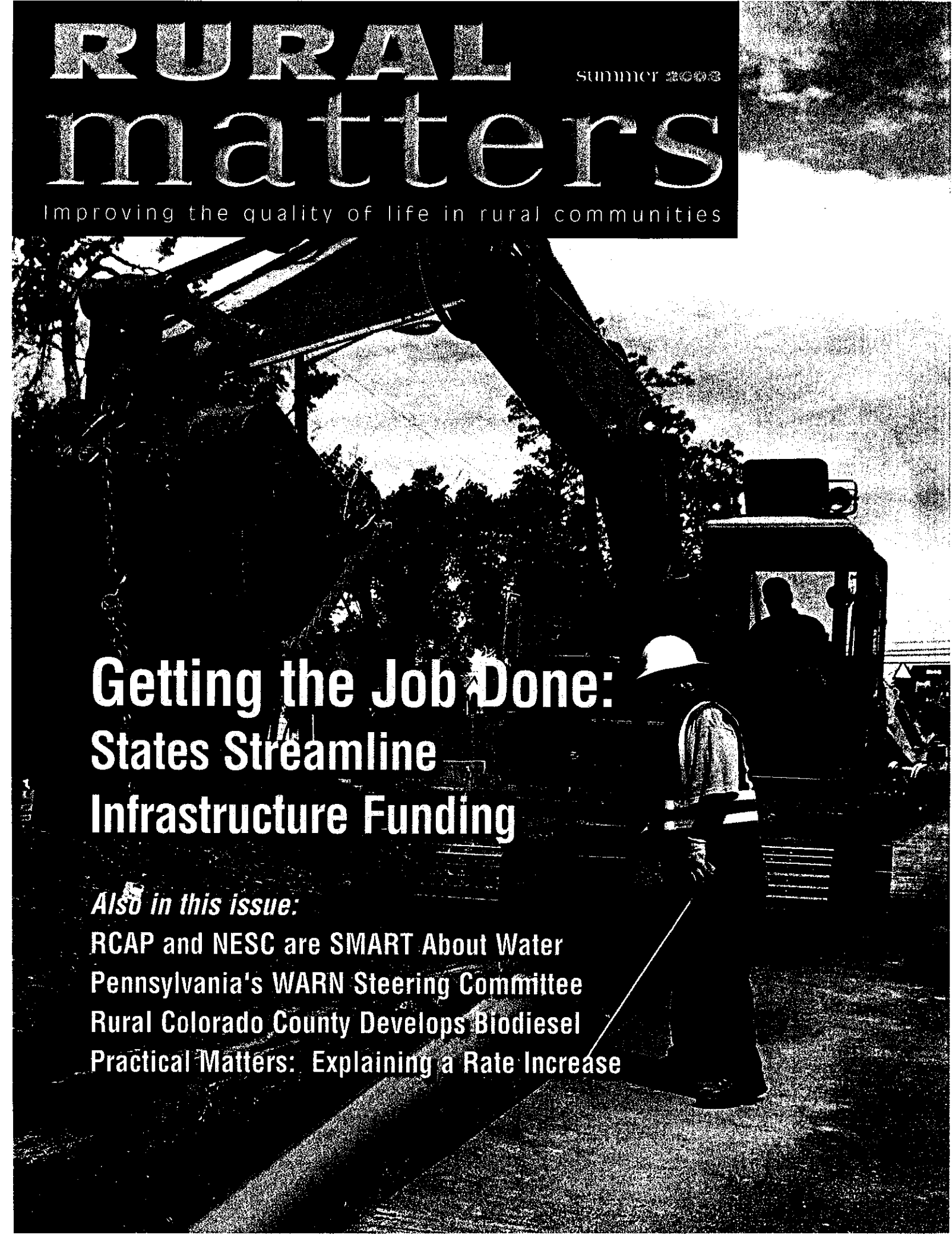


RURAL matters

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Improving the quality of life in rural communities



Getting the Job Done: States Streamline Infrastructure Funding

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Pennsylvania's WARN Steering Committee
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PaWARN Steering Committee: *Many Partners, Much Early Success*

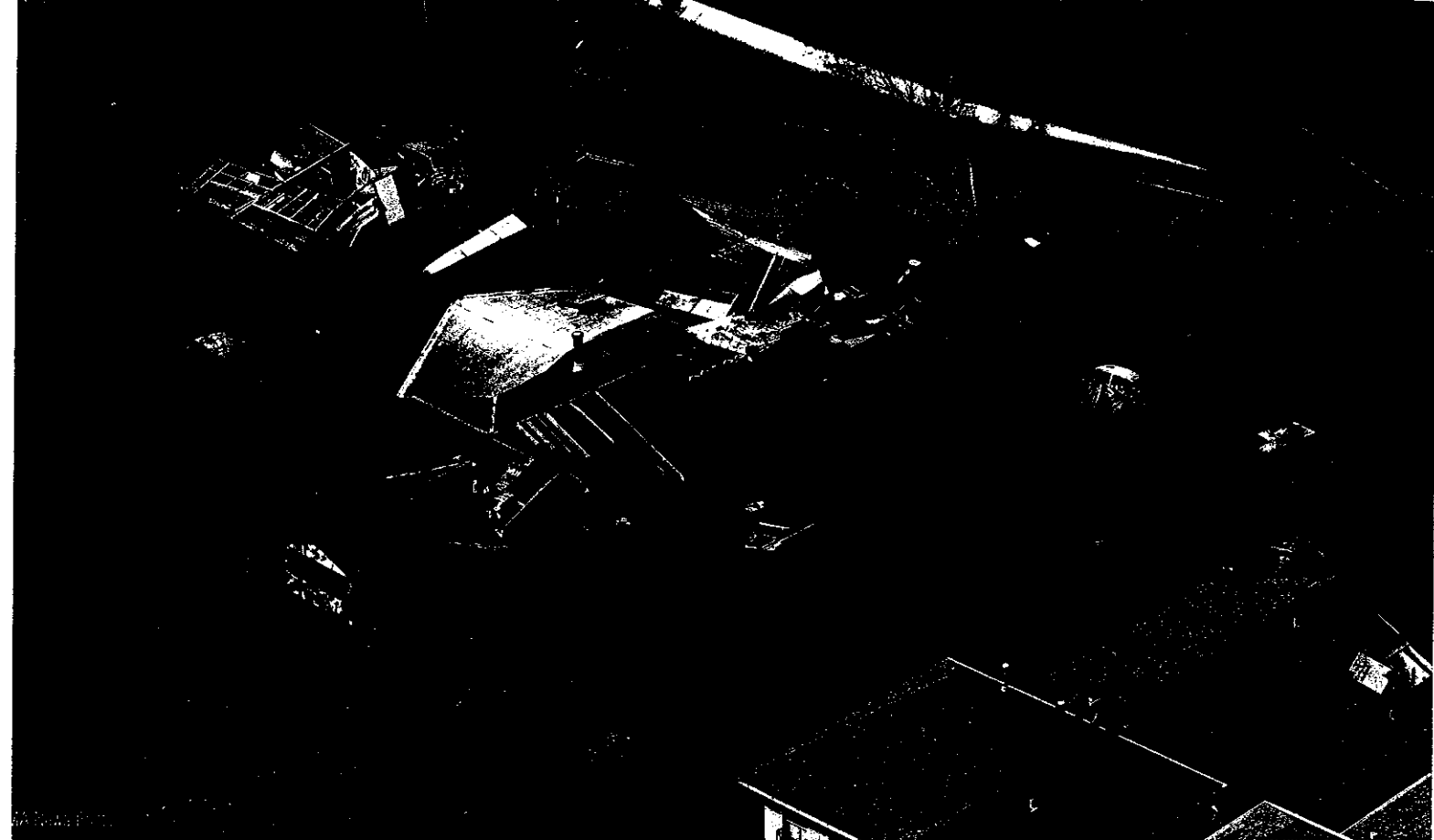
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Pennsylvania's Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (PaWARN) has become a hallmark in the development of WARN programs for the Northeast. The success of this program is, in part, due to the diversity and cooperation of the members of the steering committee. The steering committee is comprised of utility members, professional and technical associations, as well as primacy agencies that provide early stage development of the program. The purpose of the committee is to identify leadership, focus direction of the program, garner support among utilities, and facilitate coordination and communication with the existing emergency management structure within the state. PaWARN has developed an innovative and state of the art Web site to help accomplish these objectives: <http://www.pawarn.org>.

The WARN Program

A WARN program is a Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network of "utilities helping utilities." This concept involves utilities and local, state and federal governments participating in both interstate and intrastate mutual aid and assistance networks. The purpose of these networks is to provide a mechanism for water and wastewater systems that have sustained damage to obtain emergency assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials, as well as other services and expertise from neighboring water and wastewater utilities. The objective is to provide rapid, short term deployment of emergency services to restore critical operations of the affected utilities.

A pre-established agreement among a network of utilities enhances local capabilities to prepare for, and respond to, a broad range of threats. The increased ability to respond to natural and man-made disasters ensures continuity of service to the system's customers. By bringing water and wastewater services back on-line, a community's residents and businesses experience increased hope that their plight during the emergency is getting better. It is imperative that all systems in the water and wastewater community work together to support this program. The initial focus of the PaWARN was primarily on water systems, but it is equally important for wastewater systems to participate. By taking advantage of gravity for their collection systems, wastewater treatment plants are often prone to flooding and could affect downstream water intakes should they go off-line for prolonged periods of time.



The WARN program provides many benefits for small water and wastewater systems:

- There is no cost to participate in the program, which is completely voluntary.
- The member utility is not committed to respond to an event if it cannot do so.
- The program provides increased planning and coordination to emergency situations and expedites the arrival of aid.
- A single agreement provides access to all member utilities statewide as well as a pre-established relationship to share resources and specialized equipment.

All WARN programs are consistent with the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Established by Presidential Directive, NIMS helps incident managers and responders from various agencies better respond and recover from disasters through a unified approach to incident management including standard command and management structures, communications, and formalizing mutual aid networks. NIMS and Incident Command System (ICS) certifications are required for all water and wastewater systems. ICS is a standardized on-scene emergency command structure to organize field level incident management operations. NIMS implementation allows for eligibility to apply for and receive federal preparedness grants and training. Certified operators have received first responder status because of the importance of getting these utilities back on line after a disaster and should be trained in NIMS and ICS.

The Players

The PaWARN steering committee is comprised of entities that represent a good cross-section of the water and wastewater industry, and include:

Associations

- The American Water Works Association (AWWA) was the designated lead organization for developing PaWARN. Their assistance included establishing the steering committee, mission statement, policy formation and Web site development.
- RCAP Solutions served as an advocate for small systems in policy formation. RCAP conducted research in marketing PaWARN to small systems and provided input on developing the equipment list for systems.
- The Pennsylvania Rural Water Association (PRWA) was another voice for small systems. PRWA marketed the program to member systems and provided a more operator/technical perspective.
- The Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association hosted a PaWARN meeting and has been very supportive of the program with their members.
- The Pennsylvania Water Environment Association was active on the steering committee and provided recruiting ties with wastewater systems joining PaWARN.

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Government

- The Environmental Protection Agency conducted initial training on the WARN program for the state steering committees and is coordinating the national effort for mutual aid networks among states utilizing similar agreements.
- The Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania's regulatory agency, provided guidance and seed money for the implementation of PaWARN and its Web site.
- The Public Utility Commission was supportive of the program through mailing PaWARN brochures to systems and in recruiting.
- The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency supports PaWARN and mutual aid programs.

Municipal Systems

The PaWARN steering committee was well represented by large, medium and small systems from across the state, though small systems had greater difficulty attending meetings due to staff and fiscal limitations. Special thanks goes to the State College Borough Water Authority for hosting several steering committee meetings.

For-profit Systems

United Water, Aqua PA, York Water Company and PA American were active steering committee members offering a vast amount of resources for disaster response and brought a more business-like approach to the program and policy formation.

The Web Site

The Web site is the heart and soul of the PaWARN, because it is the mechanism that a system uses to request assistance. Equipment lists are available to determine which member system has the equipment or manpower that a system seeking assistance needs. A system in need can enter the local zip code and search

for member systems by a 10, 50 or 100 mile radius. An e-mail can be sent to that system, or there is a phone number for an emergency contact available 24-7, allowing contact to be made during typical non-business hours. A system is only required to respond to the request if it can provide assistance. Other WARN states utilize mass e-mails to all member systems as part of the request process. RCAP Solutions and PaWARN have reciprocating links on their Web sites to provide quick access to programs and to demonstrate RCAP Solutions' commitment to PaWARN. It is anticipated that the PaWARN Web site will be enhanced to provide security related news, alerts and weather updates that could affect utility systems and operations. In addition to the Web site, PaWARN is also promoted through a color brochure that explains the program and benefits.

What's Next?

The steering committee will turn the program over to a board comprised of a water and wastewater system from each of the six regions in the state and a representative from the Department of Environmental Protection. When it becomes its own entity, PaWARN will be member-driven and will develop its own policy and direction. Ongoing marketing of the program will continue to be a priority in an effort to increase utility membership to all systems.

Conclusions

The diversity of the steering committee member organizations, their niche markets, and a lot of hard work contributed greatly towards the success of the PaWARN. "Any chance of succeeding regionally and nationally required that the various associations come together and support the PaWARN" said Mike Snyder, of Pennsylvania AWWA and the designated lead for PaWARN development. ■

