Turning the Tide: How Collaboration Delivered Critical Clean Water Solutions in Indiana

By: Barry Suits, President of Indiana American Water



For years, many City of Charlestown residents hesitated before turning on the tap. Discoloration, odor and questions about water quality had shaken confidence in a system people rely on every day. When Charlestown chose Indiana American Water to purchase and operate their system in 2019, we promised to address those challenges and knew restoring trust would require sustained investment. That work took a major step forward in 2022 with a $16 million filtration plant – and recently, that plant reached a new milestone thanks to Indiana's State Revolving Fund Loan program. In partnership with the state, we unveiled the state's first drinking water treatment system designed to remove PFAS from the local water supply.

Serving 3,000 customers and neighboring communities, this additional investment reflects a proactive approach to water quality — one that strengthens protection for customers today and prepares our systems for tomorrow.

This project shows that protecting public health and keeping water affordable can go hand in hand. Today, Charlestown has some of the cleanest water in the state, and because of the state of Indiana's support, we were able to finance this upgrade at a lower cost than traditional borrowing — helping keep rates more affordable for the customers we serve while still making critical infrastructure improvements.

Smart Water Infrastructure Investments that Help Protect Customers in the Long-Term
This PFAS upgrade helps ensure that families and businesses receive water that meets the highest safety standards, reducing exposure to harmful contaminants linked to cancer, kidney and thyroid issues and a weakened immune system. By installing granular activated carbon (GAC), one of the preferred PFAS treatment methods used across American Water's systems, we're gaining valuable experience that will guide similar upgrades and standards for other Indiana communities in the years ahead.

This also allows us to plan ahead, lowering the risk of costly emergency interventions, service disruptions or more extensive infrastructure replacements down the line. According to The Value of Water Campaign 2024 report, without continued investment nationwide, service disruptions will cost water-reliant industries an estimated $287 billion by 2043.

Building Momentum Across the State
In coordination with our local government leaders and the state, Indiana American Water is already planning similar PFAS treatment upgrades in our Terre Haute and Johnson County's western systems, with other communities to follow as funding becomes available. Each completed project strengthens technical expertise and readiness for future upgrades and positions Indiana American Water as an experienced and critical partner to protect communities facing PFAS challenges.

This milestone in Charlestown is just the beginning. Under the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) drinking water rule, all public water systems must implement solutions where PFA levels meet federal limits by 2029. Meeting these deadlines while keeping water affordable requires the same kind of collaboration that made Charlestown's success possible. Through tools such as Indiana's State Revolving Fund Loan Program, utilities can invest in critical upgrades without burdening families and residents. With proactive planning, technical expertise and coordinated partnerships between water providers, state leaders and regulators, every community can have access to safe, clean, reliable and affordable water that Charlestown residents enjoy today.

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