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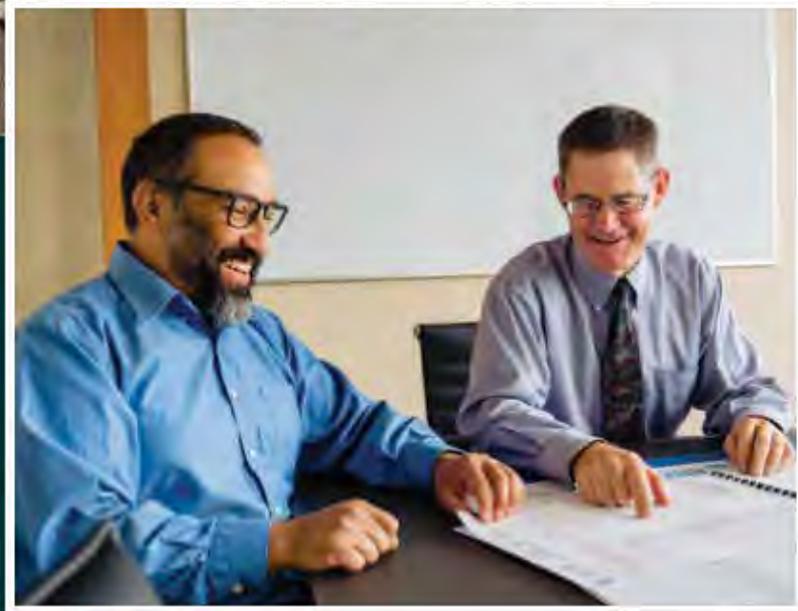
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**On the cover:**

The I-5 Interstate Bridge in the Columbia River - Portland, Oregon to Vancouver, Washington.  
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Jim Rioux, PMP, 2026 Chapter President



# Building Communities of Belonging

On October 6, 2022, during the chapter's fall conference in Spokane, I was honored to be announced as the new Chapter Secretary. This moment marked the final leg of my journey toward Chapter President.

That afternoon, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with a former colleague over lunch on her back porch. After more than 15 years apart, we reconnected through a chance encounter at the chapter's Spring conference in Tacoma.

Upon returning to Olympia, I texted her to express my gratitude for a lovely afternoon. Her reply resonated with me: "I'm glad you reached out. It's good that you have found your tribe..." Our conversations revealed that APWA and my APWA family had indeed become a place where I felt I truly belonged.

The importance of building communities of belonging extends beyond individual well-being; it is crucial for the vibrancy of our organization.

When people feel they belong, they participate fully, they contribute, they take risks, and they lead. Our organization, our profession, and our communities need people who participate fully, contribute, take risks, and lead.

When I began my journey with APWA, I encountered individuals who made me feel seen, treated me with respect, valued my contributions, and encouraged me. They didn't just welcome me into the work; they welcomed me into a community.

As I've grown within this organization, the number of people who offer that sense of belonging has also grown. I've been fortunate to meet colleagues who listen deeply, support generously, and show up authentically.

As we move into the coming year, I invite you to intentionally cultivate a culture where belonging is not accidental but purposeful. Focusing on the three communities that we touch, our APWA family, the men and women we work with, and the communities we serve, let's ask what we can do to strengthen those communities.

### Reach Out to Members, New and Veteran

Many individuals are still searching for their place within our organization. They may feel uncertain about their role and hesitant to step forward. They may even feel invisible and disconnected.

The work we are engaged in as a chapter is rewarding and very often a heck of a lot of fun! What better way to send the message that someone is valued than inviting them to come to the party and help with that work? Then, when that invitation is accepted, be the individual who listens deeply, supports, and encourages.

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**Elevate the Individuals You Work With**

We work alongside incredibly talented, passionate, and dedicated individuals. Yet even in the best environments, many do not fully recognize their own value. Sometimes, people need to hear that their voice matters, their perspective is appreciated, and their work is seen.

I encourage you to seek opportunities to celebrate those around you. It can be grand gestures, like nominating for one of APWA's individual awards, or small gestures, like posting an accomplishment to the Chapter's Kudos Wall, or simply a few words, privately or in a team meeting, letting someone know that their contributions made a difference.

When we celebrate others, we create a culture where people feel affirmed, supported, and valued.

**Show Respect for the People We Serve**

Our organizational mission extends beyond ourselves. Whether we are working in our

communities, supporting families, or engaging with individuals who rely on our services, we bear an extraordinary responsibility. Every person we encounter deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

Sometimes that can be a challenge. The work we do often creates inconvenience and discomfort for many. Even if that is only temporary, it means our first encounters with those impacted may be difficult.

This means we must slow down when our instincts tell us to get through the situation as quickly as possible and be open to alternatives, even if it means abandoning our game plan.

Our impact is not measured solely by what we do, but by how we do it. Dignity and respect should always be at the foundation of our service.

**Continuing the Work of Those Who Came Before Us**

None of this is new to this organization. Since the start of my journey with

APWA in 2006, I have seen the growth in acknowledgment of our members serving in operations and maintenance to the point where the ROAdeo is the main attraction of our fall conference, and our newest educational offering is a scholarship for individuals seeking their CDL. Our project and individual awards have become the culminating celebration of our conferences, and our Kudos Wall provides another avenue to recognize our colleagues and the work they do. With our new Ruta Jones Scholarship and the establishment of a new Veterans Committee, the Chapter continues to reach out to unseen and possibly underserved segments of our membership.

I am proud to be part of this organization, honored to serve as 2026 Chapter President, and I look forward to the work ahead of us to continue *Building Communities of Belonging.*

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# New and Returning Members

November 7, 2025 through January 29, 2026

- Sarah Anderson**, Surface Water Manager, City of Shoreline, WA
- Kory Anglesey**, Kitsap County, WA
- Ryan Blades**, City of Keisno, WA
- Lea Bonbrake**, Planning and Operations Manager, City of Shoreline, WA
- Anthony Burgess**, Kitsap County, WA
- Grant Burke**, City of Battle Ground, WA
- Faray! Chiro**, Enterprise Asset Management Systems Manager, City of Seattle, WA – Public Utilities
- Dharma Cole**, Associate Civil Engineer, City of Battle Ground, WA
- Scott Collins**, Public Works Director, City of Camas, WA
- Michael Dimmick**, Public Works Director, City of Clarkston
- Will Elder**, Environmental Services Manager, City of Vancouver, WA
- Joseph Etter**, Development Review Manager, City of Lacey, WA
- Lucas Fowler**, Civil Engineer, City of Kenmore, WA
- Dustin Gilchrist**, Construction Materials Engineer, Kitsap County, WA
- Richard Gittens**, City of Clarkston
- Christopher Grigich**, Sr. Associate Engineer, Fehr & Peers
- Jeron Griffin**, Civil Engineer, City of Des Moines, WA
- Kevin Gujosa**, Mason County, WA
- Vince Hall**, Assistant County Engineer, Lewis County, WA
- Patrick Hanley**, GIS Supervisor, City of Vancouver, WA
- Jeff Heglund**, Operations Manager, City of Port Orchard, WA
- Sharon James**, Capital Projects Support Technician

- Christine Jimenez**, Construction Contracts Compliance Coordinator, City of Everett, WA
- Reuben Johnson**, Senior Project Manager, DJ&A
- Bennett Jonathan**, Associate Transportation Engineer, City of Maple Valley, WA
- Denis Jones**, Civil Engineer Supervisor, City of Seattle, WA – Public Utilities
- Elena Maria Jukes**, Engineering Designer, AKS Engineering & Forestry LLC
- Chuck Kaufmann**, ROW Inspector, City of Kenmore, WA
- Jasmine Keaton**, Intern, City of Shelton, WA
- Brad Krupp**, Capital Projects Engineer, City of Lacey, WA
- Cristian Martinez**, Engineering Technician, Benton County, WA
- David McKenzie**, Construction Inspector, Sammamish, WA Plateau Water and Sewer District
- Robert Mendez**, Transportation Planner, Benton County, WA
- Johathan Mounahanna**, Engineer I – Construction, City of Shoreline, WA
- Cory Nau**, Engineer III – Supervisor Capital Projects, City of Shoreline, WA
- Corey Newton**, Assistant Public Works Director, City of Tacoma, WA
- Justin Nibler**, Streets/Parks Supervisor, Friday Harbor
- Michale Oleson**, Wastewater Maintenance Superintendent, City of Shoreline, WA
- Michaela Olsen**, Project Engineer, Atwell LLC

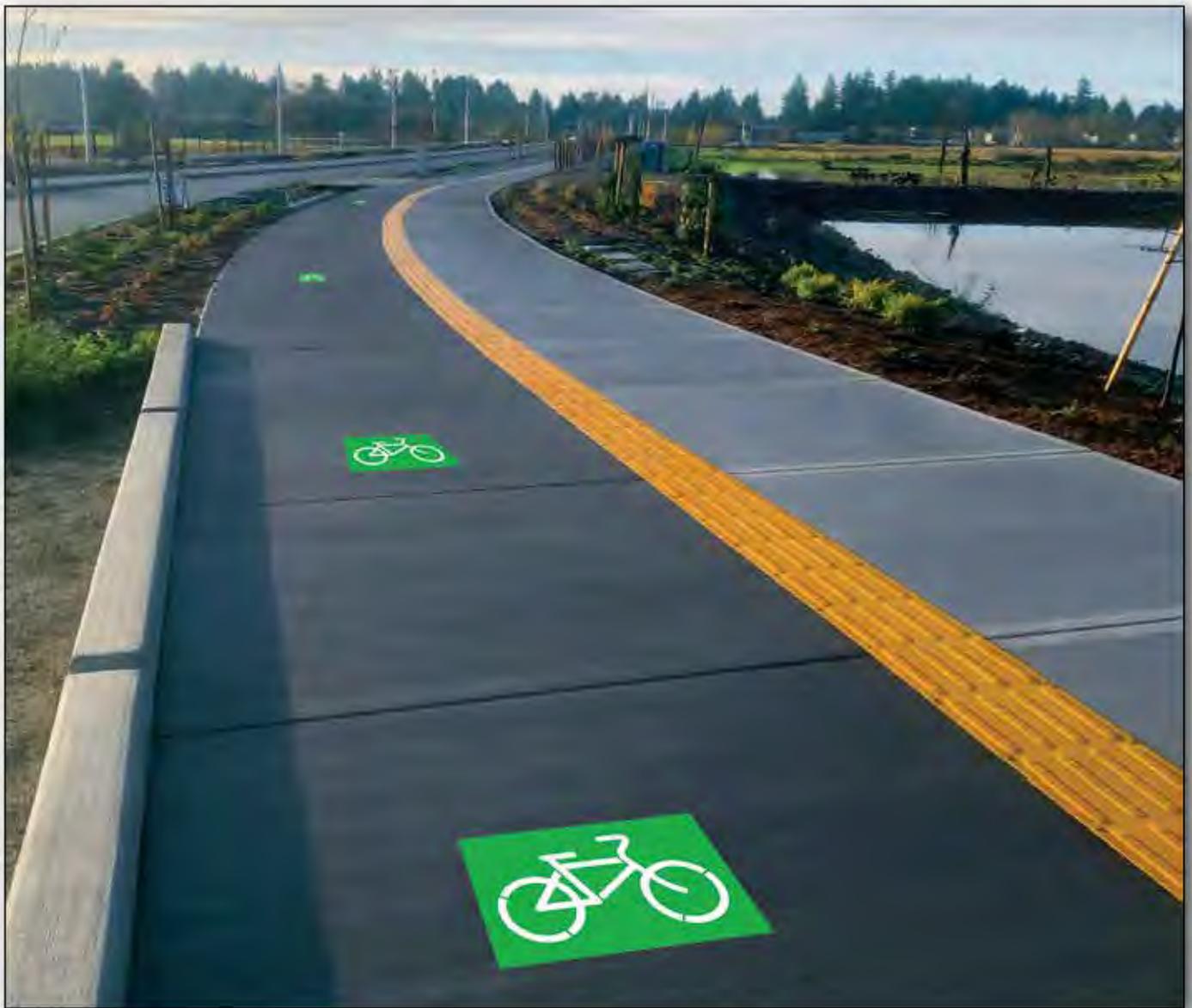
- Nikki Olsen**, Operations Supt., Clark County, WA – Public Works
- Rachael Pease**, Director of Business & Strategy
- John Pham**, Engineer, Atwell LLC
- Craig Redlinger**, Construction Division Manager, City of Vancouver, WA
- Megan Rigney**, Senior Planner, City of Redmond, WA
- Samuang Roenn**, City of Kenmore, WA
- Mehrin Selimgir**, Engineering Program Manager – Water, City of Vancouver, WA
- Joseph Short**, Public Works Supervisor, Benton County, WA
- Kalin Somero**, Master Mechanic, City of Shelton, WA
- Erin Stinson**, Project Coordinator/Inspector, City of Port Orchard, WA
- Christopher Stubbs**, Deputy Division Director
- Bogdan Tirtu**, Capital Project Manager, City of Lacey, WA
- Carlise Turner**, Civil Engineer, City of Seattle, WA – Public Utilities
- Robert Victor**, Engineer II – Capital Projects, City of Shoreline, WA
- Cynthia Walker**, Stormwater Project Principal, HDR Inc.
- Michael Wilson**, PW Assistant Director Engineering, City of Bellingham, WA
- Michelle Wright**, Project Manager, RH2 Engineering Inc.

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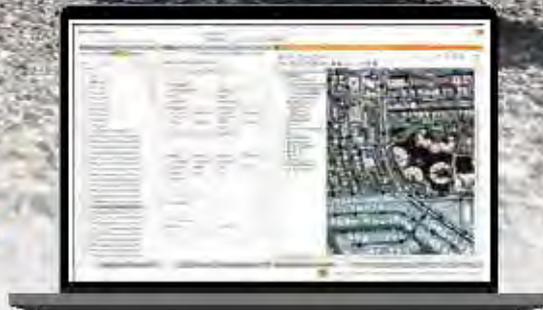
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# Impact Overview 2025

## Spring Conference

560 registrants were able to attend 34 educational sessions supported by 107 exhibitors, and 96 speakers.

Spring



## National Awards

A member was awarded one of the Top Ten Public Works Leaders of the Year. The Chapter was also awarded the PACE Award for excellence in service to our members.



Top Ten Award



PACE Award

## Project of the Year

Celebrating award-winning projects across Washington state.



9 Chapter Winners, 2 National Winners

## Classes Expand

Under the Northwest Public Works Institute (NWPWI), three new classes started training in 2025.

Summer



Construction Mgmt.

Project Mgmt.

Emergency Mgmt.

1,035  
conference attendees

Spring & Fall Conferences

## Legislative Advocacy

The Government Affairs Committee and lobbyist tracked 49 bills with impact to Public Works in the areas of funding, contracting, transportation, permitting, PFAS, and solid waste.



Tracked 49 Bills

## Fall Conference

475 attendees were able to attend 47 educational sessions supported by 98 exhibitors, and 96 speakers.

Fall



## Excellence Awards



8 Individuals & Teams

## Scholarships Awarded

9 Scholarships awarded \$32,000



\$10k

\$5k

\$4k

\$3k

\$2.5k

\$1k

## Scholarships \$25k + Raised

Individuals and orgs. contributed toward our scholarship program through the golf tournament, sponsorships and donations. A new 2025 scholarship was awarded for CDL training.



274 Golfers  
All Time High!

## Voice

Celebrated Public Works Week and the 2nd annual First Responders Day with social media campaigns.

Two organizations won the Golden Hardhat for their use of the hashtag #iampublicworks.

Winter



Golden Hardhat Winners

1,454  
educational attendees

January - December  
Conference, trainings & webinar combined

## Equipment ROADeo

Maintenance crews competed in a variety of vehicles targeted at testing skills. One contestant placed in the top ten at PWX (national).



62 Competitors, 5 Equipment Winners

# HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED?



## LEAVE A LEGACY

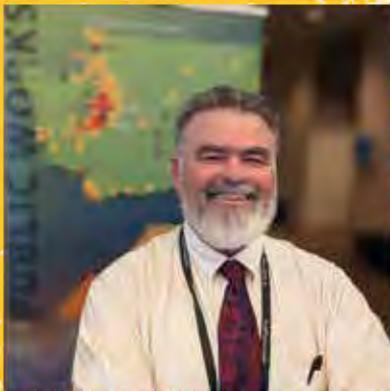


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**JIM RIOUX, PMP**  
2026 CHAPTER PRESIDENT

### MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

When people feel they belong, they participate fully, they contribute, they take risks, they lead. Our organization, our profession and our communities need people that participate fully, contribute, take risks, and lead.

APWA is a place where I feel I belong. A place where I feel welcomed, valued, and safe. My hope is that this organization be that place for everyone.

We can create that feeling for every person who walks through our doors. We can intentionally build a culture where belonging isn't accidental, but purposeful.

For the coming year join me and let's be intentional about reaching out to members that are struggling to find their place in this organization, elevating, and celebrating the people we work with, and treating the people we serve with dignity and respect. I invite you to join me and lean into the idea of...

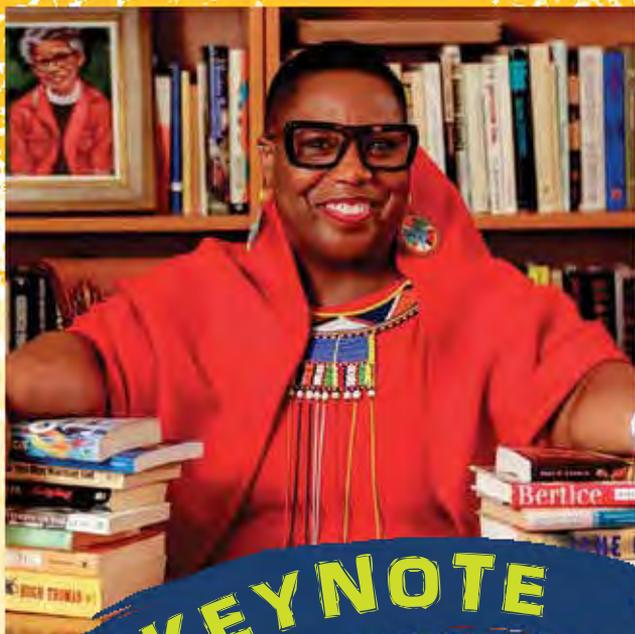
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**KEYNOTE**

**DR. BERTICE  
BERRY**

Sociologist, Bertice Berry, PhD is a best-selling author, award-winning lecturer and has been named Comedian of the Year, Lecturer of the Year and Entertainer of the Year. She has published 14 best-selling books in both fiction and non-fiction and has won numerous awards and accolades for both her writing and presentations.

Berry was the opening keynote for APWA's national conference PWX and has had her own nationally syndicated television show and has hosted, interviewed and made numerous television, documentary and radio appearances on a variety of diverse venues including The Tonight Show, Oprah Winfrey, Between The Lions, Crossfire, 20-20, NPR, PBS, Comedy Central and CNN.

Berry has used her unique gifts and talents as a writer and ghost writer for others on a wide range of topics including race and gender issues, sociological studies, stratification, healthcare reform, humor, spirituality, sexuality, slavery and the abolitionist movement, weight loss and wellness, relationships, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and belonging and love.

## *The* **PROJECT OF THE YEAR** *Awards*

APWA-WA honors excellence in successfully completed public works projects with the Project of the Year Awards. Join us for a stand alone awards ceremony on Thursday, April 16.

Learn more: [apwawaconf.com](http://apwawaconf.com)

7:00PM: Dinner & Awards

8:00PM: Entertainment - Illusionist, Nate Jester

*To attend please add Project of the Year Awards Ceremony to your conference registration or purchase tickets separately.*

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

Conflict is inevitable on complex public works projects—but it doesn't have to derail progress. This session brings together experienced professionals to share real-world strategies for resolving disputes and fostering collaboration among contractors, clients, and consultants. Attendees will learn how to apply assertive communication techniques to navigate difficult conversations while maintaining professional relationships. The panel will also explore approaches for managing contract changes and negotiating agreements that align with project goals, helping participants strengthen teamwork, reduce risk, and achieve more successful project outcomes



**CHRISTIAN NICOLS**  
- MODERATOR  
Sr Project Engineer  
PACE Engineers



**BRIAN KITTLESON**  
Associate Vice President  
HNTB



**KELLIE JAENICKE**  
Construction Project Manager  
KPFF



**KEN JASON OLIVA, PE**  
Associate Civil Engineer, Program Manager  
City of Seattle



**BRIAN SWEET, PE, CCM**  
Director Engineering - Construction Management  
Port of Seattle



### HIGHLIGHTS



3 Bonus Early Sessions Wednesday Morning!

- » *Build Quest — Making A/E/C Fun*
- » *Alternative Project Delivery: First Time Agency Perspective*
- » *Design of Raised Intersections & Curbless Streets*



**EVAN CARNES**  
Senior Managing Environmental Planner  
Anchor QEA



**DAN BERLIN, PWS**  
Principal Scientist  
Anchor QEA

## PUBLIC WORKS MITIGATION SOLUTIONS IN WASHINGTON STATE

Mitigation requirements—particularly those related to salmon habitat—pose growing challenges for public agencies. This session provides an overview of mitigation options available in Washington State, including permittee-responsible mitigation, advance mitigation, and mitigation banks or in-lieu fee programs. Presenters will walk through the City of Olympia's advance mitigation program, covering approach, timeline, and implementation activities. Attendees will also discuss common planning and implementation challenges and strategies for delivering successful public mitigation projects.





**KYLE GRAY –  
MODERATOR**  
*Lead Consultant, Civil  
Engineering  
WSP*



**MARY HEATHER  
AMES**  
*Deputy Public Works  
Director  
City of Pasco*



**MICHAEL KOSA**  
*Public Works Director  
City of Sumner*



**NOLAN SIJER**  
*Transportation  
Engineer  
Jacobs*



**CHRISTINA  
MARTINEZ**  
*Senior Vice President  
Principal Director,  
Transportation  
WSP*

## BEYOND THE BLUEPRINT: BUILDING INFLUENCE IN ENGINEERING

Technical excellence is only one component of successful project leadership. This session explores how engineers can expand their influence by understanding stakeholder priorities from both agency and consultant perspectives and tailoring communication to align project teams. Panelists will share practical approaches to building trust, resolving conflict, and strengthening collaboration across disciplines. Attendees will also learn leadership transition strategies—such as increasing visibility, advocating effectively, and applying lessons learned—that help engineers move from technical contributors to trusted project leaders who drive outcomes and accelerate career growth.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- » **Earn CE Credits!**
- » **Legislative Update - 04.15**  
Moves to after lunch!
- » **Committee Fair - 04.16**  
Learn more about the committees!

## REIMAGINING THE HEIGHTS: BUILDING AN EQUITABLE NEIGHBORHOOD

The City of Vancouver is leveraging City-owned land to advance equitable development and community benefit. This session shares lessons learned from master planning and infrastructure investment strategies that align agency goals with cost-effective solutions. Presenters will discuss how public agencies can leverage master planning objectives and developer interests to define future infrastructure needs. Attendees will gain insight into optimizing public assets to support inclusive growth, intentional design, and long-term community value.



**DUSTIN COOLEY, PE**  
*Heights District -  
Civil Design Manager  
Apex Companies, LLC*



**WILL GRIMM, AIA**  
*Heights District -  
Consultant Project  
Manager  
First Forty Feet*



**AMY ZOLTIE**  
*Heights District -  
Project Manager  
City of Vancouver*



## LESSONS LEARNED FROM DEVELOPMENT-DRIVEN TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

Transportation infrastructure often plays a critical role in supporting growth within Urban Growth Areas. This session features agency leaders sharing lessons learned from development-driven transportation projects across Washington State. Discussion will focus on key insights from pre-design phases, including master planning and environmental review, as well as strategies for effective coordination with private developers during design and construction. An interactive Q&A will allow attendees to explore practical solutions and apply shared lessons to better plan, manage, and deliver complex transportation projects.



**GREG JELLISON, PE** –  
**MODERATOR**  
*District Manager,  
Washington Transportation  
Consortium*



**RYAN LOPOSSA**  
*Transportation Manager  
City of Vancouver*



**ELIZABETH  
CHAMBERLAIN**  
*City Manager  
City of Walla Walla*



**AARON SIMMONS**  
*County Engineer  
Douglas County*



**LAURA CROSS  
REITER, PE**  
*Principal Engineer  
Cross Reiter*



**MAX DEJARNATT**  
*Associate Planner  
City of Olympia*



**MICHAEL REITER, PE**  
*Principal Engineer  
Cross Reiter*

## DATA-DRIVEN SIDEWALK ASSESSMENTS FOR SAFER CITIES

With limited budgets and growing liability concerns, cities need defensible tools to manage sidewalk infrastructure. This session showcases data-driven sidewalk condition assessments conducted for the Cities of Lacey and Olympia. Attendees will learn how to identify and quantify sidewalk defects using standardized criteria and apply GIS- and GPS-based methods to collect and manage geospatial data. The presenters will also demonstrate how to develop prioritized maintenance plans that maximize funding, improve safety, and reduce liability from pedestrian trip hazards.





**GAVIN OIEN –  
MODERATOR**

*OR Transpo. Business Unit  
Market Leader*

*David Evans & Associates*



**KEN KUBACKI**

*Vice President Northwest  
Region Manager*

*Sundt Construction Inc*



**MONICA BLANCHARD**

*OR & SW WA  
Construction Mngt.*

*Business Lead*

*WSP*



**MEGAN CHANNELL**

*Director of Capital  
Development & Planning*

*Port of Hood River*

## COLLABORATIVE ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Alternative delivery methods such as GC/CM and Progressive Design-Build require strong collaboration and shared understanding among all parties. This session examines these models from the perspectives of owners, consultants, and contractors, highlighting both opportunities and challenges throughout the project lifecycle. Panelists will discuss key success factors, differing priorities, and lessons learned from real projects. Attendees will gain practical tools and performance metrics applicable from procurement through turnover, helping improve transparency, alignment, and overall project performance in collaborative delivery environments.



**KIRK HOLMES**

*Director of Public Works,  
Emergency Services Division  
Ardurra*

## LEADING IN CRUNCH TIME

Disasters demand decisive leadership under pressure. This session focuses on five essential leadership traits that enable public works leaders to navigate uncertainty, protect public safety, and restore critical infrastructure during emergencies. Attendees will review these traits, identify pathways for developing them, and explore ways to strengthen existing skill sets. The discussion emphasizes building credibility, coordinating teams, and making high-stakes decisions effectively—equipping participants to lead with confidence when their organizations and communities need it most.





**RYAN LOOSSA**  
*Transportation Manager  
 City of Vancouver*



**ELISE STEFFEN**  
*Project Manager  
 MacKay Sposito*



**JULIE ARENZ**  
*Small Business Project  
 Manager  
 City of Vancouver*



**SHANNON BUELL**  
*Vice President of  
 Operations  
 Nutter Corporation*

**PARTNERING FOR PROGRESS: THE MAIN STREET PROMISE**

The Main Street Promise project demonstrates how collaboration and adaptive strategies can successfully revitalize a community corridor. This session highlights approaches for strengthening partnerships with local businesses and maintaining positive public engagement during construction. Attendees will learn how adaptive design and traffic management minimized parking disruptions and improved safety, while flexible construction sequencing balanced efficiency with community sensitivity and archaeological considerations. Practical examples and metrics will illustrate how thoughtful coordination can deliver infrastructure improvements while supporting economic vitality and community trust.



**PAUL WILHEM**  
*CAD & UAS Program Manager  
 City of Everett  
 APWA WA Chapter Technology  
 Committee, Co-chair*



**DOUG SMITH, PE**  
*Mechanical Engineer  
 MENG Analysis  
 APWA WA Chapter Technology  
 Committee, Co-chair*

**AI IMPROVING PUBLIC WORKS – ANALYSIS TOOLS FROM EXPERTS**

This session introduces three expert-led AI analysis tools that are transforming how Public Works agencies plan, design, and respond to complex challenges. Attendees will explore real-world applications of AI in traffic analysis and optimization, disaster response modeling, and internal pipe inspection and assessment. The discussion will identify where AI-assisted tools are currently being deployed, explain how they are integrated into active Public Works projects, and evaluate their effectiveness in improving accuracy, efficiency, and overall project deliverables. Participants will leave with practical insights into leveraging AI to support better decision-making and outcomes.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- » **Golf Tournament - 04.14**  
Supporting the Scholarship Fund
- » **Hike APWA - 04.14**  
Hike with the Membership Committee
- » **Fun Run - 04.15**  
Hosted by MPAC
- » **Augmented Reality in Public Works - Live Demo - 04.15**
- » **Cribbage Tournament - 04.15**
- » **Wednesday Night Mardi Gras Social - 04.15**  
Costumes encouraged!
- » **Project of the Year Awards Banquet - 04.16**  
Ticket purchase required.
- » **Exhibit Hall & Coffee Cart**  
Win prizes with Exhibitor Bingo!  
Complimentary coffee & snacks!





# Disaster Debris Management: How a Solid Waste Voucher Program Can Help

*This article contains examples from Snohomish, Lewis, Whatcom, Skagit & Pierce Counties in response to the December 8, 2025 atmospheric river.*

Authors:

Kirk Holmes, Director of Central Washington Services and Preparedness Programs, Ardurra, Chair of the Emergency Management Committee  
Laura Wilson, Planner III, Ardurra

**W**hen floodwaters recede, the work of recovery is only beginning. Among the most immediate and complex challenges facing public works agencies is the management of debris – an often-overwhelming mix of vegetative waste, construction materials, household goods, and hazardous items. Developing a clear, scalable debris management plan process before a flood event occurs can significantly reduce recovery time, control costs, and protect public health and safety.

## **Solid Waste Voucher Program**

Snohomish County, Lewis County, Whatcom County, Skagit County, and Pierce County initiated a Solid Waste Voucher Program to handle the flood damage debris that resulted from severe flooding triggered by the December 8, 2025 atmospheric river in the Pacific Northwest. In most cases, the program was operating within one week of the disaster, even while additional storms continued to plague the region.

Developing a good solid waste program requires forethought, planning and will address the following:

- Scope and Process

- Eligibility and Verification
- Voucher Format
- Tracking and Reporting Systems
- Coordination with Disposal Sites and Contractors
- Fraud Prevention and Audit Trails
- Public Communication

## **What to Consider When Developing a Solid Waste Voucher Program**

First, determine the purpose and scope of the program. Who are the vouchers for? What type of debris will be accepted? What time period will the debris voucher program operate?

Snohomish County's voucher program applied to residences, but businesses were not eligible. Whatcom County allowed residences and businesses access to the program. Numerous methods were used to determine eligibility. In some cases, vouchers were provided by county officials during initial damage assessments. Others did not require residents to present formal documentation of damage to receive the voucher, but the address of the residence was recorded at the time of voucher redemption. All agencies provided a specific list of accepted debris types.

Accepted items included drywall, carpet, furniture, appliances, and small amounts of household hazardous waste. Items NOT accepted under the voucher program included yard waste and trees, regular household trash, household hazard waste, large animal carcasses, and vehicles.

Lastly, all counties established a window of time the program would operate. All referenced counties had an ending date of the program ranging from two weeks to two-and-a-half months.

## **How to Establish Eligibility**

In the examples provided, eligibility was verified by county officials during a damage assessment, at office locations where residents would request the voucher, or at the time the vouchers were redeemed. Voucher redemption would occur at the disposal facility where staff could verify addresses. Using pre-disaster records or GIS mapping to confirm locations can also aid in establishing eligibility. Assigning unique voucher IDs can prevent duplication and fraudulent use of disposal services.

### How Voucher Format Can Aid in Tracking and Clarity

Voucher formats should present information in clear, accessible language and include a reliable method for tracking. Some counties chose to provide vouchers in multiple languages to improve accessibility. When technology permits, tamper-resistant printing or QR codes can further support effective tracking. Linking vouchers to a centralized database can be a significant time saver, enabling real-time monitoring and simplifying the generation of reports required for federal or state reimbursement. Requiring disposal sites and contractors to log vouchers immediately also helps ensure the accuracy of real-time data. Communication efforts were often supplemented with press releases outlining key details such as expiration dates and permitted debris types, while authorized disposal sites were listed directly on the vouchers.

### Disposal Sites & Contractors

Coordinating with disposal sites and contractors, if used, will provide a smoother process for community clean-up. Officials can pre-negotiate rates and acceptance procedures of the debris. This will also require training site staff on voucher validation and record-keeping. Ensuring sites have backup paper logs is essential in the event of a technological failure.

### Getting the Word Out: Public Communication

Finally, the importance of communicating with the public is key to success in a voucher-based system. All the impacted communities and counties referenced in this article used various methods of public communication. The most frequent methods were the jurisdiction's main website, emergency management website, social media, and the local newspaper. They provided clear instructions on how to obtain and use the vouchers, provided approved disposal locations, and provided contact information for questions.

### What We've Learned

The December 8, 2025 atmospheric river demonstrated, once again, that disaster debris management is not just an operational challenge – it is a critical component of community recovery. The Solid Waste Voucher Programs implemented by Snohomish, Lewis, Whatcom, Skagit, and Pierce Counties show that with advance planning, coordination, and clear communication, jurisdictions can move quickly to remove debris, reduce public health risks, and help residents and businesses take meaningful first steps toward recovery.

These programs worked because they balanced flexibility with accountability. Clear eligibility criteria, defined debris types, strong tracking systems, and close coordination with disposal sites allowed counties to scale their response rapidly

while maintaining the documentation needed for cost control and reimbursement. Just as important, the programs centered residents by removing financial and logistical barriers at a moment when communities were already under stress.

As flood events and severe storms become more frequent and intense, solid waste voucher programs should be viewed as a proven, adaptable tool in every debris management toolbox. Investing time now – before the next disaster – to develop program frameworks, build partnerships, and establish communication strategies can dramatically shorten recovery timelines when disaster strikes. Prepared communities recover faster, spend more wisely, and protect public health more effectively. In disaster debris management, planning ahead is not optional; it is essential. 🗝

### DISASTER DEBRIS RESOURCES



EPA:  
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Debris"



APWA:  
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# 2026–2027 SCHOLARSHIP

## Call for Applications

By Liam Olsen,  
Scholarship Committee Chair,  
Jacobs

APPLICATIONS DUE JUNE 19, 2026

**A**PWA-WA Chapter Scholarship applications for the 2026–2027 school year are now open! With scholarships for two-year and four-year schools, our goal is to assist individuals with their educational pathway into the public works industry. This year, six scholarships will be offered for a total available scholarship amount of \$26,000. Applications are due June 19, 2026 and are available online at the Chapter website.

Public works offers a huge variety of jobs and many students can be eligible. From engineer, surveyor, environmental scientist, GIS specialist, communicator, graphic artist, writer, mechanic, equipment operator, accountant, HR professional, administrative professional, and many others – public works has an opportunity for everyone. As a public works professional this is your chance to make a difference in the life (and budget) of a student by sharing our scholarships with your social circle.

### **Jack Pittis Memorial Scholarship (1), \$10,000**

### **Higher Education Scholarships 4-Year Degree (2), \$5,000**

The Washington State Chapter of the American Public Works Association is offering one \$10,000 scholarship to honor Jack Pittis. Jack was an active member of APWA, a past Chapter President, and a

friend who is greatly missed. Jack's legacy was one of leadership, commitment to his community, and dedication to his role as a public servant. The Washington Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) is seeking scholarship applicants who exhibit a devotion to career and community similar to Jack Pittis and students who are pursuing a future in the public works industry. Additionally, the Washington Chapter is offering two \$5,000 scholarships to students pursuing a four-year degree.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

1. The application process is open to undergraduates currently enrolled in four-year degree programs and full-time students in community colleges that will be enrolled in a four-year institution as an entering junior or senior as of fall 2026. Applicants must be enrolled in a college or university in the state of Washington. Students enrolled in an out-of-state school will not be eligible.
2. To be eligible for consideration, the applicant shall be majoring in a field related to Public Works (Civil, Structural, Transportation, or Environmental Engineering, Construction Management, Environmental Science, Communications, Public Administration, etc.).

3. The applicant shall be an entering Junior or Senior as of the fall 2026 school year.
4. The applicant shall meet the respective school's definition of full time standing for the 2026–2027 school year.
5. Evaluation criteria will include scholastic achievement, a dedication to community involvement, activities and interests beyond the classroom, and demonstrated knowledge of the public works industry.

### **Higher Education Scholarships 2-Year Degree (2), \$2,500**

The APWA Washington State Chapter is also offering two \$2,500 scholarships to students in two-year colleges or technical schools. These scholarships are directed to students in pathways or programs that will benefit the field of public works. The application process is open to students currently enrolled in two-year programs. Applicants must be enrolled in a college or school in the state of Washington. Students enrolled in an out-of-state school will not be eligible.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

1. To be eligible for consideration the applicant shall be pursuing a course of study that will lead to a career in public works. This can include the engineering field directly related to Public Works,

e.g., engineering, surveying, GIS, mechanics, communications, administrative services, marketing, construction administration, environmental sciences, operations, etc.

2. The applicant shall be a full-time student as of the fall 2026 school year.
3. The applicant shall meet the respective school's definition of full time standing for the 2026/2027 school year.
4. Evaluation criteria will include, in addition to scholastic considerations:
  - Beyond the classroom activities and interests
  - Community service efforts
  - Responses to essays and situational questions

#### **Ruta Jones Memorial Scholarship (1), \$1,000**

In honor of Ruta Jones, an active servant leader of the APWA Washington Chapter and caring employee of the City of Wenatchee for over 40 years – the WA Chapter is offering a \$1,000 training scholarship to Administrative Professionals

supporting the public works industry. Please forward to the administrative staff in your office for their consideration.

In Ruta's honor, the Washington Chapter is offering this scholarship to provide the opportunity for a public works administrative or support staff member to attend a training of their choice. Ruta earned her degree in Business Administration from Central Washington University and she relished any opportunity to continue her learning journey. This scholarship is offered to any current administration staff member of a public agency or APWA-member firm. The scholarship will reimburse up to \$1,000 for conference or training registration, lodging, and transportation. Winner will submit receipts and be reimbursed up to \$1,000.

#### **Eligibility Criteria**

1. The application process is open to administrative or support staff at APWA-member agencies or firms.

2. The applicant shall meet their employer's definition of full-time employment for the current year.
3. Evaluation criteria will include excellence in work history, a dedication to community involvement, a commitment to continuing education, and demonstrated knowledge of the public works industry. 📄



For more information and to download an application:

<https://washington.apwa.org/scholarship/scholarship-applications>

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MRSC is a research nonprofit that offers local government staff free, one-on-one guidance with legal and policy consultants. Below are inquiry responses the MRSC Public Works Consultant. If you work for a city, county, or contracted special purpose district, Ask MRSC by calling 800-977-6553 or emailing [mrsc@mrsc.org](mailto:mrsc@mrsc.org).

## Buying & Selling Supplies/Equipment



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The following are some questions MRSC has received regarding local governments buying and selling supplies and equipment.

**Q:** *Our city is selling a fire truck. Do we keep all the maintenance and repair records or transfer these to the buyer?*

**A:** Maintenance and repair records would be considered public records because they relate to one of your agency's assets. We checked the Common Records (CORE) v.5.0 (Oct. 2024) schedule applicable to local governments. It looks like maintenance and repair records related to agency assets are to be retained for three years after the completion of the work, and then they may be destroyed. For more information, see CORE, p. 95, Section 2.7, Disposition Authority Number (DAN) GS2012-040, Rev. 1. As a practical matter, we would expect the new owner of the fire truck would like a copy of the maintenance and repair records so they understand what work has been done on the truck. We suggest retaining any records that fall within the applicable retention period (three years) and providing a copy of those records to the new owner. Operating manuals for agency assets are another consideration. There is another DAN for operating manuals at Section 2.8, p. 96. Basically, it requires that an agency

retain the operating manual until it is superseded or until the agency disposes of the related asset (for example, by selling the equipment). If the sale or disposal of an asset occurs, manuals can be transferred to the new owner or destroyed.

**Q:** *Our public agency would like to purchase a piece of used equipment. It's priced at a point where it probably will not be available long enough to do competitive bidding. Does our agency have any other options?*

**A:** This may come under the exception to competitive bidding at RCW 39.04.280(1)(b) for "purchases involving special market conditions." This exception could apply where an agency has to act fast (i.e., not enough time to go through the bid process) to take advantage of a good deal that will not be around long, such as when a used vehicle comes on the market. If an agency uses the "special market conditions" exception to competitive bidding, there are certain procedures set out at RCW 39.04.280(2)(a) that the agency must comply with. For more information, see the section *Purchases Involving Special Facilities or Market Conditions* on our Competitive Bidding Exemptions page (<https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/procurement/basics/competitive-bidding-exemptions>).

**Q: Our town has an old mower it wants to sell. Is there a dollar amount maximum we must sell it at before it has to go to auction or online bidding?**

**A:** There is not a state law dollar amount for when surplus town property is required to go to auction or online bidding. There aren't too many rules with regard to disposing of personal property owned by a town (unless it was originally acquired for public utility purposes).

The town can choose to sell personal property, online, at an auction, through sealed bids, direct sale, or any way it sees fit. If your town does not have one, we recommend adopting a policy for disposing of surplus property before selling the mower.

If the town has a local policy for disposing of surplus property, your town council would decide whether to declare the mower surplus to the town's needs and the process to follow to sell the item.

**Q: The city has an old service truck that we tried to surplus on a public surplus site, and it did not meet the reserve price. Now there is a person interested in the truck who is offering a higher price. Can the city sell it directly, or does it need to be posted on the surplus site again?**

**A:** The city could likely sell it directly to the interested individual, provided there are no city policies related to disposal of surplus property that would prevent that method of disposal. We provide the following guidance on MRSC's Surplus City or Town Property webpage (<https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/facilities/management/surplus-city-property>):

*"Personal property" generally refers to anything other than real property (land and buildings). Common examples of surplus personal property include vehicles, computer equipment, tools, and office furniture.*

*In general, there are no statutory requirements for cities regarding the disposal of personal property. (AGO 1997 No. 5 concluded that the public hearing requirement in RCW 39.33.020 only applies to intergovernmental property transfers made pursuant to chapter 39.33 RCW.)*

However, there are certain exceptions for intergovernmental property transfers, personal property originally acquired for public utility purposes, library reading materials, firearms, or seized/forfeited property, all discussed later on this page. Items with commercial value can generally be sold by any number of methods, such as online or in-person auctions, sealed bids, "for sale" ads, fleet management services, direct sale to an individual, trade-in, or other methods.

**Q: Does our city need to conduct an RFP process to buy a new street sweeper, or can we just purchase it from a vendor of our choice?**

**A:** The competitive requirements needed for the street sweeper will depend on the estimated project cost. If your estimated purchase is \$40,000 or

less, you may choose to follow a small-purchase process and purchase from a vendor of your choice. Otherwise, a method of competition may be required.

As noted in the Competitive Bidding Overview section of MRSC's Find Your Contracting Requirements webpage (<https://mrsc.org/mrscstools/procurement/Procurement-Purchasing-City-Results.aspx?jID=88&jName=Grandview>):

- If your estimated purchase is \$40,000 or less, you may use a small purchases process, vendor list, or formal competitive bidding.
- If your estimated purchase is between \$40,000–\$50,000, you may use a vendor list or formal competitive bidding.
- If your estimated purchase is more than \$50,000, you must use formal competitive bidding. ■



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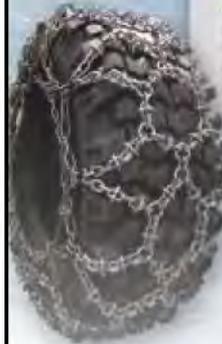


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# Leading in Crunch Time

## Emergency Management Leadership During Times of Crisis

Authors:

Kirk Holmes, Director of Central Washington Services and Preparedness Programs, Ardurra,  
Chair of the Emergency Management Committee  
Laura Wilson, Planner III, Ardurra

**L**eadership development gets a lot of attention and investment as organizations work to grow and improve. Agencies invest in leadership development because good leaders motivate their teams, make tough decisions, earn trust, and help develop the next generation of leaders. However, much of what's written about leadership comes from a corporate setting – where leaders often have more control, formal training programs, and the ability to steer people and processes more directly.

Strong leadership is even more important when a crisis hits. When communities face emergencies or natural disasters, leadership is tested in real time. Decisions often must be made quickly, with limited information, and those decisions can have immediate – and lasting – impacts on public safety, public trust, and recovery efforts.

For this article, the crisis is defined as a period of danger, difficulty, or confusion in which problems must be solved and important decisions made under pressure. In looking at the fundamentals of crisis leadership, two useful articles stood out: *5 Keys to Crisis Leadership: How to Prepare and Lead in a Crisis Situation* by Ronald E. Riggio in *Psychology Today* ([www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/202301/the-5-keys-to-crisis-leadership](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/202301/the-5-keys-to-crisis-leadership)) and *5 Fundamentals of Effective Crisis Leadership* by Amy Federman of ConantLeadership (<https://conantleadership.com/5-fundamentals-crisis-leadership>). While each takes a different approach, one focused on outcomes and the other on relationships – together they offer practical tools leaders can use when facing a crisis in their organization or community.

### Human-Centered Leadership

*"How are my people experiencing this crisis right now?"*

Effective crisis leadership starts with focusing on people – both inside your organization and out in the community. A crisis disrupts routines, increases stress, and creates uncertainty. For many public employees, the pressure to keep essential services running is compounded by personal challenges caused by the same event. Leaders who recognize this, listen to their teams, and show genuine care help create stability during chaos. Putting people first means acknowledging effort, addressing concerns honestly, and weighing the human impact of decisions alongside operational needs. When employees feel supported, they are more likely to stay engaged, adaptable, and committed when the pressure is on.

### Clarity of Purpose and Direction

*"What must remain clear, even under pressure?"*

In a crisis, confusion can cause as much damage as the event itself. Leaders add value by cutting through the noise and defining what matters most in the moment. That means setting priorities, reinforcing core values, and explaining the “why” behind decisions. Clear direction helps crews focus on critical work, reduces mixed messages, and builds confidence in leadership. When purpose stays visible and consistent, employees are better equipped to make good decisions in the field, even as conditions continue to change.

### Behavior Over Authority

*"What leadership behaviors will stabilize and mobilize people?"*

During a crisis, people pay more attention to a leader's actions than their title. Employees look for cues for how to react, adjust, and keep moving forward. Leaders who stay calm, consistent, and accountable help steady the organization. Showing flexibility while holding firm to core principles encourages active problem-solving rather than fear or decision paralysis. By focusing on how decisions are carried out – not just what decisions are made – leaders build trust and keep teams moving in the same direction.

### Radical Transparency and Communication

*"Are we reducing uncertainty – or unintentionally increasing it?"*

Clear, honest communication is critical during a crisis. When information is limited or unclear, rumors and assumptions quickly fill the gaps. Leaders should communicate early and often, sharing what is known, being upfront about what isn't, and explaining what comes next. Repeating key messages across multiple channels and allowing for two-way communication helps to ensure that everyone is on the same page. When communication is consistent and transparent, employees feel informed and prepared rather than anxious or disconnected.

### Decisive Action Under Uncertainty

*"What decisions can we make now to create the most stability?"*

Crisis events require decisions be made quickly, often without all the facts. Effective leaders must balance thoughtfulness with decisive action, understanding that waiting too long can create more problems. Setting direction, acting with intent, and adjusting as new information comes in helps maintain momentum and confidence. Avoiding indecision shows employees and the public that leadership is engaged and responsive. In uncertain situations, steady and timely decision-making is essential to keeping operations running and maintaining public trust.

Crisis events are unplanned, but leaders can build, learn, and incorporate skills now to prepare for future events. 

# Building Belonging Through Mentorship: Find Connection in the APWA Washington Mentorship Program

Written by Elena Jukes, EIT AKS Engineering & Forestry, Inc., [jukese@aks-eng.com](mailto:jukese@aks-eng.com), Co-Chair – Mentorship Committee

Edited by Alyssa Ardourel, PE, Huitt-Zollars, Inc., Co-Chair – Mentorship Committee and Nick Tucker, KBA Inc., Chair – Publications Committee

**T**he impact of public works can be seen everywhere in the infrastructure that supports our daily lives. Behind this impact, though, are the quiet and often invisible challenges many experience in career growth: learning in isolation, navigating career uncertainty, and struggling to **find a sense of belonging** in a complex, multidisciplinary field. The APWA Washington Mentorship Committee exists to help overcome these challenges.

## THE CHALLENGE

Across public works agencies, a common pattern emerges:

- Institutional knowledge is lost as experienced professionals retire or move on
- New professionals struggle to integrate, ask questions, or see clear career paths aligned with their interests and values
- Mid-career professionals experience plateaus and uncertainty about how to grow, pivot, or lead
- Training often focuses on technical skills, while leadership, communication, and confidence are learned “the hard way” through trial and error

Without intentional knowledge transfer and supportive guidance, even the most capable professionals can feel disconnected or lost. Mentorship is more than a “nice to have” resource; it is critical to retaining and building talent while also bridging generations, disciplines, and experience levels.

## THE SOLUTION

The Mentorship Committee connects professionals across the Washington Chapter of APWA through a structured Mentorship Program serving participants with varied backgrounds and experience. The Program provides focused mentorship and professional development resources to support:



- Early-career professionals looking for guidance, confidence, and a safe place to ask questions
- Mid-career professionals who are navigating career growth, looking to transition in their career, learning to lead, or seeking certifications
- Seasoned professionals who want to share their knowledge, leave a legacy, and help shape the future generations of public works
- Public works professionals who value community, shared learning, and purposeful connection

The Mentorship Program goes beyond one-way knowledge transfer – mentors learn from their mentees as well!

## HOW IT WORKS

Annually, in the spring, the Mentorship Committee opens registration for the Program. We only require mentors to be APWA members. Mentors and mentees are matched based on their registration responses, and each pair is then matched with a Program Committee liaison. The Program runs from September through June and includes three committee-hosted events.

The Committee also provides resources for mentors and mentees, including

goal-setting worksheets, discussion topic ideas, coaching and support, and mentor toolkits. The Committee is also actively developing additional resources based on participant and Chapter feedback.

## WHY SHOULD YOU PARTICIPATE?

In the Program, you will be partnered with someone who shares your interest and passion in public works and a desire to grow. While mentors must be APWA members, anyone in the public works industry can participate as a mentee. You will gain access to our mentorship resources, our supportive and friendly community, and unique networking opportunities that will help you cultivate connections and broaden your career in public works! We also hope you will find a sense of belonging and keep in touch even beyond the Mentorship Program.

Don't just take our word for it; past participants and APWA members shared their testimonials and support:

*“The APWA-WA Mentorship Program was an excellent opportunity to connect with colleagues in other agencies, learn about their unique career paths, discuss regional challenges, and, through sharing our experiences, identify effective*



ways to collaboratively approach Public Works projects. I found having casual conversations, free of the complexities entangling our routine project work, was valuable to freely share lessons learned to better serve our communities!"

– Robert Hanlon, King County

"I think the strength of APWA-WA's Mentorship Program is how thoughtfully the program was structured and implemented. For example, there is a strong emphasis on follow-up with both the mentor and the mentee. When needed the Mentorship Committee volunteers will engage with either the mentor or the mentee and offer guidance or assistance as needed. This ensures that the experience is valuable for both."

– Jim Rioux, APWA Washington President

When asked about how mentorship is supportive for the public works community in Washington, Brandi Wilson from Kitsap County had this to say:

"Mentorship builds and strengthens our communities because it connects people working on the same goals – men, women, young, old, all with different experiences – when I talk to other people, my mentee or other elected officials, I get

to see a very different perspective. Everyone brings something to the table, and all of us working together is really going to make it a better place."

Brandi enthusiastically reported that she learned as much from her mentee as she hopes her mentee learned from her and looks forward to supporting the Mentorship Program into the future.

**The Mentorship Program is for everyone**, and we hope you'll join us next year!

#### TAKE THE NEXT STEP

To find out more, visit our website: <https://washington.apwa.org/education/mentorship>.

Mentorship Program applications for the 2026–2027 session will open in April. To be alerted, reach out to Alyssa Ardourel ([aardourel@huit-zollars.com](mailto:aardourel@huit-zollars.com)) or Elena Jukes ([jukese@aks-eng.com](mailto:jukese@aks-eng.com)). We are also happy to share more information about the APWA WA Mentorship Program or provide copies of the Mentorship Program Guidelines and resource documents.

We hope you'll join us in building a deeper sense of belonging within APWA, one connection at a time! 



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## NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK & GOLDEN HARD HAT COMPETITION

May 17-23, 2026

Each May, National Public Works Week (NPWW) gives public works professionals across North America a well-deserved moment in the spotlight, and, even more importantly, an opportunity to tell our story.

Over the decades, NPWW has grown significantly in reach and impact. Participation by municipalities continues to expand, and with it, public understanding of the essential services public works provides every day. From clean drinking water and reliable transportation networks to stormwater management, solid waste, sustainability, and emergency response, public works professionals quite literally keep communities running.

Across the United States and Canada, APWA's more than 30,000 members use National Public Works Week to engage residents, elected officials, and community partners in meaningful conversations about the planning, building, managing, and operating that happens behind the scenes – often unnoticed, but never unimportant. These conversations help connect the dots between infrastructure investment and quality of life, reinforcing the value of public works as a cornerstone of healthy, resilient communities.

### A LEGACY OF RECOGNITION

APWA has sponsored National Public Works Week since 1960, designating the third full week of May to recognize the profession. Just two years later, in 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued a proclamation

underscoring the vital importance of public works to the nation's health and welfare. He praised the dedication of public works professionals and emphasized that it is in the public interest for citizens and civic leaders to understand – and remain engaged in – the public works needs of their communities.

That message remains just as relevant today. As infrastructure ages, communities grow, and challenges such as climate resilience and workforce development intensify, public works professionals are being asked to do more than ever before. National Public Works Week is a chance to highlight not only what we do, but why it matters.

### MAKING PUBLIC WORKS VISIBLE

Public Works Week is your opportunity to bring visibility to the work that often happens out of sight and at inconvenient hours. Whether through hands-on events, educational exhibits, or digital storytelling, positive interactions with the public build understanding, trust, and long-term support. Communities that understand public works are more likely to advocate for the policies and funding needed to keep infrastructure strong.

Participation doesn't need to be complicated or costly. What matters most is authenticity and connection.

### IDEAS TO SHOWCASE PUBLIC WORKS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Looking for inspiration? Here are several ways to engage your community during NPWW:

- **Request an official proclamation** from your mayor, council, or governing body at least a month in advance.
- **Plan a week of activities** that partner public works staff with community environmental or stewardship projects.
- **Create a public exhibit** highlighting recent projects, innovations, or accomplishments.
- **Display equipment** used in day-to-day operations – these are always crowd favorites.
- **Host an open house or facility tour** to discuss projects, operations, and future plans.
- **Recognize your team** with an employee appreciation or recognition event celebrating their contributions throughout the year.
- **Promote healthy living** by sponsoring or participating in a local walk, run, or sporting event.
- **Engage students** through a t-shirt design contest, job shadowing opportunities, or an equipment "show and tell."

(Additional ideas and planning resources are available on the APWA National website.)

### TAKING THE MESSAGE ONLINE

#### National #NPWW

APWA National provides a full suite of downloadable assets for the 2026 theme *Rooted in Service, Powered by Community* – including posters, coloring pages, and social media graphics. A suggested week-long social media posting guide is also available, making it

easy to maintain a consistent and engaging online presence throughout the week.

### Washington Chapter #iampublicworks Golden Hard Hat Competition

Beginning May 17, 2026, public works professionals across Washington are encouraged to use the hashtag #iampublicworks on LinkedIn and Facebook to help amplify the story of public works. Posts using the hashtag between May 17 and September 18, 2026, will be entered to win the **Golden Hard Hat Award**, along with up to 10 commemorative t-shirts for the winning individual or organization.

The Golden Hard Hat recipient will be recognized at the **Fall Conference, October 7–8**, celebrating not just online posts, but the collective pride of a profession that shows up every day to serve its communities.

National Public Works Week is more than a celebration – it’s a reminder. A reminder that what you do matters, that your work shapes daily life in tangible ways, and that telling your story helps ensure public works remains visible, valued, and supported for generations to come. ■

## NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK IS COMING UP MAY 17–23, 2026.

March is the perfect time to start planning your organization’s participation!



APWA National Resources:  
[www.apwa.org/events/national-public-works-week-npww](http://www.apwa.org/events/national-public-works-week-npww)



Washington Chapter & Golden Hard Hat Resources:  
<https://washington.apwa.org/resources/i-am-public-works-toolkit>

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# HIDDEN HAZARDS ON THE JOB: WHY WASHINGTON PUBLIC WORKS MUST LEAD ON LITHIUM-ION BATTERY SAFETY



Based on APWA Public Works Radio, Episode 2: "Understanding the Safety Risks of Lithium-Ion Batteries", Featuring: Snohomish County

Lithium-ion batteries are everywhere – powering phones, tools, e-bikes, electric vehicles, and increasingly disposable vape pens. What many in the public don't realize is that these compact energy sources also pose serious, often underestimated dangers to public works crews, waste haulers, recycling centers, and first responders. What begins as a seemingly harmless disposal can rapidly escalate into a truck fire, toxic smoke event, or explosion.

The APWA Public Works Radio episode two, "Understanding the Safety Risks of Lithium-Ion Batteries," explores how these compact energy sources pose serious dangers to public works crews and communities at large. This episode should sound a wake-up call for public works agencies throughout Washington State and beyond.

## A GROWING AND UNDER-RECOGNIZED THREAT

In the episode, APWA's Bailey Dickman speaks with professionals confronting these realities daily: **Scott Messier**, Operations Manager at Snohomish County Public Works (Washington), and **Craig Willis**, HAZMAT Captain with South County Fire in Snohomish County, along with **John Gorney**, Public Works Director from Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Messier doesn't mince words:

"The one thing about the waste business is ... it's one of the most dangerous occupations listed by OSHA ... and now with the lithium-ion battery, it has just made it so much worse."

At the heart of this heightened risk are the billions of disposable and rechargeable devices with hidden batteries – especially vape pens. These devices are increasingly showing up in general waste streams where they are crushed by compactors, overloaded into trucks, and hauled without proper sorting or awareness of the hazard.

## WHY VAPE PENS ARE A MAJOR FIRE DRIVER

Unlike single-use items like batteries from flashlights or toys, vape pens often contain sealed lithium-ion cells that users discard casually, unaware of the danger. In waste streams, when these batteries are punctured, crushed, overheated, or otherwise damaged, they can undergo *thermal runaway* – a rapid chemical reaction that releases intense heat and flammable gases, leading to fires that are difficult to detect and suppress.

The emerging term "*vape effect*" is now used to describe this phenomenon: waste and recycling facility fires are increasingly traced back to lithium-ion batteries from discarded vapes. Across North America, data show that waste facility fires are at record levels, largely fueled by the growing presence of these devices in the municipal waste stream.

In fact, some reports show that improper disposal of vape products has been identified as the leading cause of the recent increase in waste-facility fires, with many incidents occurring when batteries are compacted or crushed in trucks and facilities.

## A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE: WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC WORKS WORKFORCE

Washington's public works professionals are no strangers to evolving operational risks – whether seismic retrofits, climate impacts, or transportation demands. But battery-related hazards demand fresh urgency. Agencies like Snohomish County Public Works are already grappling with the downstream consequences of everyday disposals gone wrong.

Messier's warning is stark and practical:

"Think about the repercussions that throwing away a battery may have... Think about how to do the right thing to protect somebody else."

That call to action extends not only to crews on the job but to the communities they serve – especially given how common vape-related battery fires have become.

### WHAT PUBLIC WORKS AGENCIES MUST DO NOW

The *Public Works Radio* episode delivers more than anecdotes – it offers a clear directive: agencies must address this risk on multiple fronts, especially as vape pens are now among the most prevalent mobile lithium-ion battery sources entering waste streams.

#### 1. EDUCATION AND PUBLIC MESSAGING:

Most residents simply don't know that vape pens contain lithium-ion batteries or that tossing them in the trash or recycling can cause a fire. Tailored outreach campaigns and clear disposal instructions – from utility bills to social media – can reduce improper disposal significantly.

#### 2. CREW TRAINING AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS:

Crews handling waste, recycling, and material collection should be trained to recognize and respond to battery hazards, including vape pen cells. This includes knowing when to stop operations, isolate suspect loads, and coordinate with hazmat or fire personnel.

#### 3. EXPAND SAFE DISPOSAL OPTIONS:

Partner with local recycling centers, hazardous-waste programs, and manufacturers to establish accessible battery drop-off sites across Washington. Encouraging residents to return disposable vape devices to designated e-waste collection points can dramatically cut risks.

#### 4. FIRST RESPONDER COORDINATION:

Cross-training with fire departments like South County Fire ensures that emergency responses to battery fires – especially unexpected ones in enclosed spaces – are swift and safe.

#### THE BIGGER PICTURE: WORKFORCE PROTECTION AND RESILIENCE

Public works professionals keep communities functioning – but their work can't succeed if crews are injured or sidelined by preventable incidents. Lithium-ion battery risks are not just operational hazards; they are a workforce safety issue that intersects with public education and municipal services.

As Messier succinctly puts it, "... just be a good citizen."

In a world increasingly powered by portable electronics, that statement stretches beyond courtesy to a matter of public safety. Washington public works leaders must not only recognize the hidden danger of lithium-ion batteries in waste streams but also lead with decisive policy, education, and operational strategies to protect workers and communities alike. ▀



**TO LISTEN TO THE NEW APWA PUBLIC WORKS RADIO EPISODE TWO 'UNDERSTANDING THE SAFETY RISKS OF LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES,' SCAN THE QR CODE.**



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# BRAIN *Ziegle Bits*

By Brian Ziegler

## What Is Work – Part 2



**P**art 1 of this article explored how technology shaped careers, especially mine, during the 1970s through the 1990s (essentially, we went from slide rules and handheld calculators to desktop computers and email). Work evolved to accommodate, and even exploit, these new technologies, but if those three decades saw incremental transformation, the next three saw exponential change.

Who could have foreseen broadband transmission of video and data, immense calculation power in the palm of our hand, or digital “co-pilots” that could analyze, edit, and even compose documents on our behalf?

In the early 1990s, phones were phones, mobile or otherwise, but

the mobile ones greatly increased connectivity for field personnel. In the late ‘90s, my teenage kids thought pagers were all the rage because they could connect in “real time” with their friends (it was also a great electronic leash for us parents). Toward the end of the decade, text messaging crept in, making the first phones “smart.”

But to me, the coolest phone on the planet in the ‘90s was the flip phone. With it, I was on the deck of the starship Enterprise, “communicator-ing” with my team on distant planets. My fantasy world was shattered, however, the first time I tried to flip open my communicator, with a valiant “Beam me up, Scotty,” it ended up in the men’s room toilet (explain THAT to accounting...).

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In the early 2000s, Blackberry cornered the smartphone market by putting a complete QWERTY keyboard on the face of the phone, generating the new idiom “thumb-o” to replace typo.

Apple blew up the Blackberry market with their first iPhones in 2007, marking the true entry into the era of “internet on the go.” It was still the w-w-w (world-wide-wait), but hey, we could surf anywhere, anytime!

Once we started progressing through the various “generations” of wireless technology, it seemed Moore’s Law was about to be put to the test. “How can these things get any faster?” I remember asking myself when I went from a 2G to a 3G phone. “Hold my beer” has been the consistent industry response.

Universal broadband has changed the nature, the location, and the intimacy of work. In the late 1990s business world, the hype of internet commerce grew so quickly that people felt like they would be left behind if they didn’t invest. The NASDAQ Composite Index, one measure of this phenomenon, more than doubled in value in one year (1999) and then lost most of that value the next year. Dubbed the “dot-com bubble,” it reminded the world that technology doesn’t change the basic rules of business success.

I mention this bust because it highlights a human tendency to seek innovative one-stop solutions to our problems. Software vendors can exploit this tendency and ply their wares like that old Ragu spaghetti commercial (“It’s in there. It’s in there. It’s in there, too.”).

Government buyers can also get caught up in the bright, shiny features of a software solution and forget a basic caution –which I repeat –“If you’re disorganized now, computers will only make you disorganized at light speed.” The moral here is to clarify your goals and processes BEFORE putting them on steroids.

If you’re in the business of transportation, emergency response, water, or sewer, you know that real-time data acquisition and assessment have made huge strides in the last few decades. For example, starting in the mid-’90s, drivers could access real-time traffic volume information (at least in the Seattle area) and plan their travel accordingly.

Water and sewer system operators began monitoring flow data and trends to plan resource allocations. Acronyms like SC&DI and SCADA popped up to describe these new data-collection and reporting technologies. Internet and wireless speed increases have expanded the reach and transparency of system owners, giving the ratepayers more reliable projections of costs and reliability.

All good, right? Yes, as long as we don’t forget one important fact: Technology always embeds our values; we can’t separate the two. A recent article on the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI) startled me with this statement: “AI doesn’t have morals, only a prediction algorithm.”

This is a stark reminder that GIGO (garbage in – garbage out) has been amplified by technology and has affected many social trends, for good or ill. As government servants, we have an obligation to be intimately aware of our technological limitations and the

ethical values embedded in them, and to communicate this transparently to the public.

Back to my technology timeline – in the 2010s, we saw the advent of cloud storage, followed closely by cloud computing. Now, because of broadband internet, massive amounts of data can be stored remotely and accessed from multiple devices and locations. While this facilitates a lot of data sharing, it also introduced ownership and security concerns.

Commercial websites usually have firewalls and password controls, but now I need a password to access my own data, even to access my own computer! It seemed to me like the U.S. Constitution was being upended, and everyone was assumed guilty until proven innocent. I suppose it was inevitable, though, that as soon as we concentrated value in one location, it would become a target for nefarious actors.

The advertisement for SeaTac Lighting & Controls Roadway Group features a dark blue header with the company logo and name. Below the header, a photograph of a modern street lamp illuminating a road at dusk serves as the background. Text on the left describes the team's expertise in custom lighting solutions for various projects. On the right, a list of services is provided with circular icons. At the bottom, a call to action invites contact for project assistance.

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One technological advancement I really loved was automatic vehicle location, or AVL. Whether based on cellular or private networks, the ability of a field supervisor to know where their inspectors and crews were located was a game-changer. Of course, privacy concerns limited full use of the technology, but efficiency gains were documented, and more than a few safety hazards were greatly reduced. (We had a dump truck roll – inverted – down a steep slope once, but were able to locate the driver immediately. Amazing.)

The 2020s have brought 5G cellular speeds, the “internet of things,” and most notably, AI. Future advances will likely include deepfake videos, neural links, and a real challenge to understanding what it means to be human. I’m excited about how humanity will benefit from these advances, but I remain cautious about the potential harm. So let me close with a compelling question – and a piece of AI advice.

A compelling question hit me as I was contemplating the meaning of life (retired people have the time to ponder these kinds of questions). I came across a statistic from a 2023 study which asked people under 30 about the meaning of life. In

2008, 15% of people under 30 believed life was meaningless. In 2023, this number had climbed to 58%.

The alarmist in me started listing all the reasons for this, and sad to say, technology and social media made the cut. I’m sure these aren’t the primary reasons for the prevalence of meaningless in our youngest employees, but leaders and supervisors should be aware of this trend anyway.

Lastly, some advice on the use of AI. In the 1976 movie, *The Pink Panther Strikes*

*Again*, Inspector Clouseau approaches a hotel clerk with a dog sitting next to him and asks, “Does your dog bite?” The clerk says no, so Clouseau reaches down to pet the dog, which growls and promptly bites him. Indignant, Clouseau yells at the clerk, “I thought you said your dog doesn’t bite.” The clerk responds, “That is not my dog.”

The lesson for me – AI serves us well only if one asks the right question.

Until next quarter, keep asking the right questions! 🐾

***“The lesson for me – AI serves us well only if one asks the right question.”***

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An advertisement for Stantec featuring a construction site with a large crane and the text "Transforming Transportation". The background is a photograph of a highway interchange under construction. In the top left corner is the Stantec logo. Below it is the text "Transforming Transportation". In the bottom left corner is a location pin icon followed by "I-90/SR 18 Interchange Snoqualmie, WA". In the bottom right corner is a white button with the text "STANTEC.COM".

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# APWA Celebrates the Dedication of Public Works Recently on Display

Source: [APWA.org](https://www.apwa.org)

**A**s we continue to recover from the recent severe winter storm system that swept across the United States, we've witnessed stories that again underscore the essential role public works professionals play in safeguarding communities. As leaders within APWA and public works, we are aware that those who serve in public works often perform their duties under dangerous and exhausting conditions without a lot of fanfare.

That's why we want to take this opportunity to highlight recent media coverage that celebrates public works first responders and the critical work they've been doing during this recent extreme weather. Here are just a few of the stories we've seen in early February of 2026:

- In Cincinnati, Ohio, an Ohio Department of Transportation snowplow driver, Joe Estes, cleared miles of snowcovered roads during a severe winter storm so an ambulance carrying a critically ill infant, Bryson, could safely reach Cincinnati Children's Hospital – an effort he called "the most important trek" of his career.
- In Massachusetts, snowplow driver Matte McGarry spotted a pair of legs flailing from a deep snowbank while plowing during a winter storm and immediately stopped to pull an older man to safety. The man had fallen headfirst into the powdery snow and was unable to free himself, Thanks to his quick actions, the man's life was saved.
- A Vernon, Connecticut garbage truck driver, Doug Haiko, noticed a distressed mother with her choking 18-month-old son and immediately intervened, using his medical response training to perform back blows that cleared the child's airway. He kept the boy warm until emergency crews arrived and was later recognized by town officials for his lifesaving actions.
- A quick-thinking Ohio DOT snowplow driver, Yvonne Caudill, spotted a 7-month old kitten trapped in a snowdrift, stopped



her plow, pulled the kitten to safety, and warmed him up before contacting authorities. The kitten – now named Drift – was treated for injuries and is recovering well at the Fayette Regional Humane Society.

- The future of public works is in good hands in Washington, DC. The city's "Snow Team Heroes" program matches youth around the area with residents who are unable to clear snow from their sidewalks so that neighborhoods can be cleared and functional in a timely manner. The young snowfighters receive training and supplies from the city and even complete reports for their assigned sections. Their assistance was requested for 1,500 homes in the recent snowstorm, an impressive amount of work for a group of teens to tackle.

These stories, and dozens of others we've seen in communities across the nation, remind us how essential the work being done by public works is. They ensure that emergency responders can operate, critical infrastructure remains functional, and residents have access to the services they rely upon during extreme weather.

We thank each and every one of you who has answered the call over the past few weeks. We know the hours are long and the conditions are difficult, but we applaud how deeply the roots of your service run. ■

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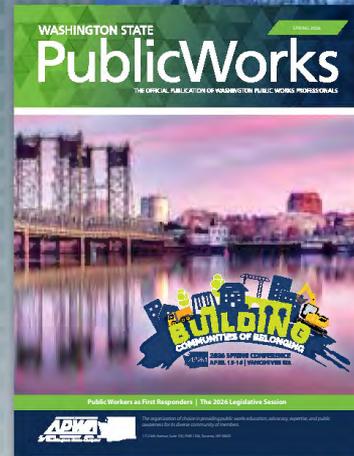
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**USE PAPER RESPONSIBLY**



**REDUCE  
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**Today's forest industry is working hard to become one of the greenest industries on earth.**

Paper is an essential part of human civilization. While we all use and depend upon electronic communications, it is easy to ignore that it comes at an environmental cost. Worldwide spam email traffic creates greenhouse gases equivalent to burning two billion gallons of gasoline yearly, with numbers rising. More than \$55 billion in toxic e-waste material is thrown away every year in the US alone, with a recycling rate of only 20% compared to 64.7% for paper.

No industry is perfect. But the paper industry has made, and continues to make, huge investments in environmental responsibility. Specifying and buying paper from certified sources ensures the continuation and growth of carbon absorbing forests. Using paper with appropriate amounts of recycled fibre helps preserve forests, conserve energy, and maximize fibre usage through paper lifecycles.



# Stop Pollution at the **Source!**



## SNOUT<sup>®</sup>

*"The Original Trash Capture Hood"*



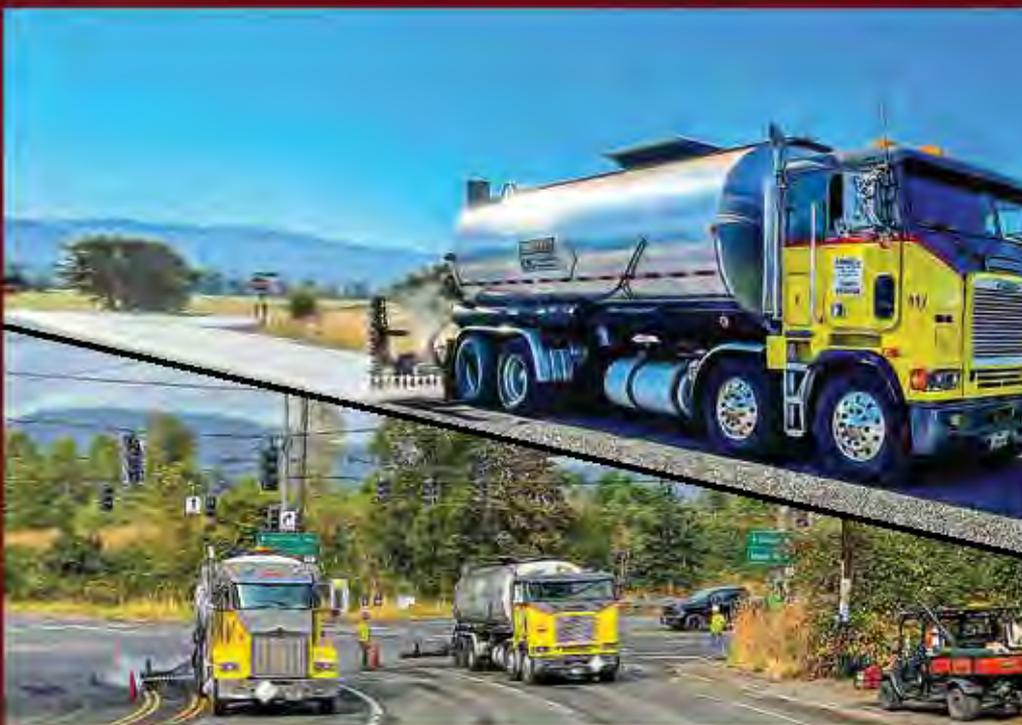
**Over 100,000 Installations  
throughout North America**

Our Snout<sup>®</sup> system has been leading the charge in stormwater management for over 25 years. Designed to last, it captures pollutants at the source and reduces downstream pollution. For optimal performance, add the Bio-Skirt<sup>®</sup> and Turbo Plate<sup>®</sup>.

### **Proven Stormwater Treatment You Can Trust**

Don't let trash flow downstream. The Snout<sup>®</sup> stormwater treatment hood reduces floatables and sediment in storm drains. Pair it with the Bio-Skirt<sup>®</sup> for enhanced oil capture and the Turbo Plate<sup>®</sup> to tame high-velocity flows and increase sediment removals. Together, they deliver effective trash capture and sediment control without overcomplicating maintenance.





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