



For immediate release
July 23, 2009

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Water Summit Keynoter Catherine Gerali Describes "Culture Change" at Agency

Catherine Gerali, district manager of the Metro Wastewater Reclamation District in greater Denver, CO spoke of the “cultural change” faced by her district in preparing for a large capital investment over the next 20 years in her presentation at the Construction Management Association of America’s just-concluded Water Summit. The cultural shift, she explained, is fueled by the pressure the district faces to learn quickly about new ways of delivering projects.

Gerali’s keynote highlighted the Summit, which brought together representatives of major project owners, along with managers from prominent CM/PM firms including URS, Parsons, Arcadis, Jacobs, Worley Parsons, CH2M Hill, PBS&J, Black & Veatch, Balfour Beatty, HDR, and others.

Gerali’s agency serves about 1.6 million people and operates the largest wastewater treatment facility in the Rocky Mountain West. It is now looking toward a major increase in demand as well as a need to replace or refurbish again infrastructure.

“If ever we needed Program Management and cost control we need it now,” Gerali said. “We are looking at spending \$2 billion in the next 20 years, and for us that is huge. We do not have the expertise on board to be able to deal with the many issues we are going to be facing.”

Adding support in the form of consultant services has been “a big cultural change for staff,” Gerali added. “There was a lot of angst, a lot of tension, a lot of ‘we don’t really need help.’ But once staff got over that mindset and was able to really look at the situation and realize that we don’t have the resources...there has been a 180 degree turnaround.”

The district has also modified many of its long standing contracting practices. “We’re looking at pre-purchasing equipment, risk sharing, bonus and penalty clauses. We were very good at having penalty clauses for our contractors, but we were not very good historically at really teaming up with our design consultants and contractors. It’s extremely important to do this, and we will come out with a much better project than if it is all one way.”

“The district,” Gerali said, “is a very, very traditional Design-Bid-Build entity and we have virtually no experience with alternate delivery and we have to learn very quickly.”

Key industry players such as Ken Kirk of NACWA, Harlan Kelly of the San Francisco Public Utility Commission, and Dave Scott of the City of Baltimore spoke at the Summit’s opening plenary session Sunday. The program, made up of 15 powerful breakout sessions, offered attendees the opportunity to learn strategies used in major successful water and wastewater projects nationwide.

Leading organizations including Nation Association of Clean Water Agencies, International Private Water Association, Building America’s Future, Water Environment Federation, Society of American Military Engineers, and the National Association of Water Companies supported the Summit as a valuable and innovative event in the field of Water.

To view complete highlights from the Water Summit, visit <http://www.cmaanet.org/blogs/jmckeon>.

CMAA is North America's only organization dedicated exclusively to the interests of the professional Construction and Program management industry. On behalf of its 25 regional chapters and more than 5,500 public and private firms and individuals throughout the nation, CMAA promotes the Construction Management industry and provides professional resources, advocacy, professional development, certification, and business opportunities to its members. CMAA's national headquarters is located in McLean, Va. The Association’s website is www.cmaanet.org.