



Essential Utilities Breaks Ground on New Water Quality Laboratory to Serve Aqua Customers

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BRYN MAWR, Pa.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--

Essential Utilities Inc. CEO Christopher Franklin and Chief Environmental Officer Dr. Chris Crockett joined Aqua Pennsylvania President Marc Lucca, DEP Regional Director Pat Patterson and a host of state and regional elected officials and contractors as they broke ground on the site of Aqua's new water quality laboratory. Essentials' Aqua family of companies provides drinking water and wastewater services to more than 3 million people across 8 states including approximately 1.4 million people across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, most of whom live in the Philadelphia suburbs.

The ceremonial groundbreaking represents the start of construction of a brand new, state-of-the-art laboratory that will sit at the site of the company's Bryn Mawr headquarters. Franklin said the construction of the new lab is a continuation of the company's mission to protect the public health and ensure high-quality water. This is the same mission that led to the formation of the company 134 years ago. "Our company was founded by Swarthmore college professors whose concern for water quality inspired them to build a pumping station for their community. That attention to water quality remains at the center of all we do today and is key to our ability to provide our customers with safe drinking water every day," said Franklin.

The new two-story building, at 14,700 square feet, will more than double the size of the current 6,400 square foot laboratory that has served the company for more than 60 years. The primary laboratory will be on the first floor with an additional pilot testing lab on second floor, which provides more space to enable Aqua to adapt to the dynamic regulatory environment that will require additional sampling and equipment.

Aqua's laboratory is certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and four other state environmental and health regulatory agencies. The lab employs a professional staff of 20 microbiologists and chemists who perform 300,000 tests on 30,000 water samples each year. These scientists use 50 different analytical methods for 240 different water quality parameters.

Lucca said that water and wastewater testing capability and expertise is necessary for drinking water and wastewater operations. "We conduct routine and special testing to ensure the water we deliver is safe and that the wastewater we treat and return to our rivers, lakes and streams is cleaner than it is when we remove it to treat it for drinking water.

Crockett said the investment in the new laboratory is required to maintain pace with the advancement of science. As an example, he pointed to the fact that the number of regulated contaminants for drinking water jumped from 23 in the 1970s to 90 by 2000. "In the same period, we've gone from measuring in parts per million to parts per trillion, a million-fold increase in detection levels," said Crockett. In addition, as Aqua continues to add more and more customers and systems through acquisition, the ability for the laboratory capacity needs to keep pace.

Crockett added that on Feb. 27, Essential announced a proactive step in standardizing its activities to address the presence of the contaminants Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), Perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) and Perfluorononanoic acid (PFNA), which are part of the PFAS family of chemicals, in drinking water across the eight-state Aqua footprint. Aqua's current laboratory is one of two laboratories accredited and the only utility certified to test for PFAS in Pennsylvania. Aqua added PFAS testing capability in 2016 in response to the emerging concerns about this family of contaminants and in 2019 Aqua committed to testing every one of its nearly 1,500 water sources to understand exactly where PFAS exists. Aqua's lab and analytical expertise enabled this commitment and the new lab will continue this extended capability.

Beginning in 2020, Essential will make the necessary capital investment in the range of tens of millions of dollars over several years to install mitigation technology at water treatment facilities where source water exceeds 13 parts per trillion (ppt) for any of the three PFAS chemicals. PFAS are a concern in communities across the country where water is believed to have been contaminated by nearby military bases or other causes. Setting a company-wide standard of 13 ppt will enable Essential to address the contaminant uniformly across its eight-state footprint.

Setting a company-wide standard of 13 ppt will enable Essential to address the contaminant uniformly across its footprint, which includes nearly 1,500 water systems in eight states. Currently, the EPA's PFAS non-enforceable health advisory level is 70 ppt. Although the EPA announced last week it will move to set an enforceable standard around PFOA and PFOS in the future, that federal standard is a few years away.

Aqua's new lab is expected to be completed and in operation by the spring of 2021.

Following the closing of its Peoples acquisition on March 16, Essential will be one of the largest publicly traded water, wastewater and natural gas providers in the U.S., serving approximately 5 million people across 10 states under the Aqua and Peoples brands. Essential will be committed to proactive infrastructure investment, regulatory expertise, operational efficiency and environmental stewardship. The company recognizes the importance of water and natural gas in everyday life and is proud to deliver safe, reliable services that contribute to the quality of life in the communities it serves. For more information, visit www.essential.co.

Aqua Pennsylvania is a subsidiary of Essential Utilities Inc. and serves approximately 1.4 million people in 32 counties throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Visit AquaAmerica.com for more information or follow Aqua on Facebook at facebook.com/MyAquaAmerica and on Twitter at @MyAquaAmerica.

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