# Water Policy Issue Brief

## SUMMARY

The Utilities Technology Council (UTC) supports water utilities through its advocacy work in Washington, D.C., as well as through education and training on information and communications technology for water utility operations. Today's water infrastructure investments are focused on digitalization, smart devices, advanced security and automation, all of which require IT/OT integration and reliable, real-time communications networks. UTC is the only trade association focused on the nexus of telecom and technology for utilities of all types and sizes.

## ADVOCACY FOR WATER

Access to spectrum is essential for the day-to-day delivery of reliable utility service and for water utility efforts to upgrade and modernize their water delivery systems. One of UTC's main advocacy priorities centers around spectrum availability for wireless communications. Utilities and other critical infrastructure industries use radio spectrum for data and voice communications which ensure the safe, secure and reliable delivery of electricity, water, and natural gas. Spectrum allows water personnel to communicate with devices to monitor, maintain, upgrade, and repair water lines. It is vital as new "smart" technologies promise to give customers more control over their water usage.

To provide suitable coverage and capacity, utility spectrum should be in a frequency range that will provide favorable propagation and offer sufficient broadband or wideband for the increasing amount of traffic that is carried over utility communications networks. On behalf of its members, UTC advocates for access to additional licensed spectrum and to protect existing spectrum that water utilities use for their wireless communications systems.

Another key advocacy is the recently introduced legislation, which may impact water utilities and tower joint use for radio attachments and small cell networks. The STREAMLINE Small Cell Deployment Act (S 3157) will require state, local and tribal jurisdictions to make decisions on whether to approve applications for the attachment of small cell devices within 60 to 90 days. If the jurisdiction fails to act within this timeline, the application would be automatically approved.

UTC's members frequently manage wireless collocation programs for siting small cells and macro wireless facilities on their infra-structure. UTC advocates for policies that protect utility infrastructure to ensure safety, security and reliability and to provide utilities with just compensation for third parties to attach equipment to provide commercial communications services.

Supply chain risks and security are also key priorities. Water utilities are committed to mitigating the risks posed by their supply chains. While it is important to protect our utility devices from attack, we know it is also important to be able to afford the devices required to deliver safe, reliable service. UTC has been working with the Department of Homeland Security and others to develop tools that will not only assist water utilities and others to assess the security of the information and

communications technology they are deploying on their systems but also provide them with ways to conduct risk assessment.

Finally, rural water utilities are exploring the business case for providing broadband service to their customers. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and other federal agencies have focused efforts to promote broadband in unserved and underserved areas of the country, which tend to be rural areas, in which water and electric utilities can be in the best position to bring broadband services to these locations.

Despite programs that help to fund the high cost of providing broadband in these areas, broadband services are not being deployed in a reasonable and timely basis to all Americans, according to the FCC's own assessments. Americans continue to lack access to fast, reliable, and affordable internet services, as telecommunications providers have not invested in these rural locations for economic reasons. Instead, many water and electric utilities have filled this gap. Many utilities are providing broadband in rural areas, helping connect many Americans to the internet.

UTC advocates for policies that support the opportunity for utilities to access federal funding to provide broadband services to unserved and underserved areas of the country.

## ABOUT UTC

The Utilities Technology Council (UTC) is a global trade association dedicated to serving critical infrastructure providers. Through advocacy, education and collaboration, UTC creates a favorable business and regulatory environment for critical telecommunications systems in support of their core business. Founded in 1948, UTC was initially created to advocate for the allocation of additional radio spectrum for power utilities.

Over the years, UTC has evolved into a dynamic organization that represents electric, gas and water utilities critical infrastructure companies and other industry stakeholders. From its headquarters in Washington, UTC provides information, products and services that help members:

- Manage their telecommunications and information technology more effectively and efficiently

- Voice their concerns or support of policy proposals to legislators and regulators

- Engage in peer-to-peer relationships with other telecom and IT professionals

- Interface with manufacturers and telecommunications carriers on issues like cybersecurity

UTC is the bridge between the critical water sectors and the telecommunications industry. On behalf of our core members, we advocate for policies on issues ranging from spectrum access necessary for routine, day-to-day operation of their systems to cybersecurity, broadband expansion, and much more. For more information, visit UTC.org

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