

Public Works is Synonymous with Infrastructure

Public Works plays such a critical role in Canada's public infrastructure that the term "public works" is often considered synonymous with the word "infrastructure." Indeed, infrastructure assets are, for the most part, "public works" – infrastructure that is owned and operated in the public domain. In reality, public works' role in our nation's infrastructure is even grander than the actual infrastructure assets themselves. For these assets require planning, building, operating, and maintaining and it is to the municipal public works departments and professionals that most of these responsibilities fall.

Public Works – Improving Community Life

The operation of municipal public works is crucial to each community's health and safety as well as the continuing improvement in the quality of life. Roads, sidewalks, bridges, public transport, public buildings and parks, snow removal, water systems, sanitation or waste water treatment facilities – all are within the domain of public works and all essential to the well-being of our communities. These infrastructure assets are at their best when they are operated, monitored, maintained, and improved by public works professionals. Public works departments play an important role in the management of these assets and thereby extend their benefit to the public and prolong their useful life.

Public Works – Providing Stimulus to the Economy and Employment

Often, it is to improvements in public works and infrastructure that Governments turn to stimulate economies and employment. Such projects serve to benefit the local communities with increased opportunity for employment and improvement to the local economy. Investment in public works projects can have lasting benefits to communities far into the future.

Public Works - Plan for Today and Tomorrow

Public works is also more than building the roads that bring you to your work place each morning. Public works is an ongoing process and one that takes into account all stages of the planning, building, operation, repair and maintenance of all our infrastructure. Public works does not operate without a plan and asset management plays an important role. The most successful departments implement an asset management strategy that takes into account the entire life cycle of each infrastructure asset and coordinates their maintenance to maximize their longevity and return on investment, all while planning for the future.

Public Works – Managing and Mitigating Emergencies in our Communities

Canadian public works professionals are on the front line for planning, responding, and recovering the nation's life sustaining infrastructure following manmade and natural events. More than just playing a role as first responders, "first in and last out" are words that are true of public works involvement in disaster response and recovery.

Additionally, public works organizations across the country are facing the "new normal." In recent years we have seen historic flooding in Alberta, a devastating ice storm in Ontario, and extremely harsh winters that left our public works professionals working to address extreme snowfall and other issues that many view as the growing impacts of climate change. Add to these natural disasters, the results of manmade events and the impacts from deteriorating infrastructure, and you begin to see the plethora of emergency management issues that face our public works professionals.

Public Works – Professionals Innovating for the Future

Public works professionals are among the first in recognizing and responding to changing and new conditions and in evaluating and embracing new initiatives. For example, public works professionals are on the front lines in recognizing and preparing for the influences that climate change will play upon our infrastructure assets. Public works professionals also recognize the important role that asset management and sustainability initiatives play in the future of our country's infrastructure.

Indeed, the challenges before public works professionals are becoming more and more complex each and every day. Today's public works professionals must not only have a thorough knowledge of how systems work within public works, but are also called upon to display managerial and leadership skills that traverse all levels of the community. Today's public works professionals must be able to effectively communicate with the community, media, and government. They must have an understanding of government, finance, resource management and of managing staff and creating talent pools of individuals for the future of the profession. It is no wonder that so many of today's public works professionals find themselves in a somewhat different job than they might have had 15 years ago.

To this end, public works professionals and their departments continuously strive to improve. Many public works professionals hold advanced degrees in a variety of disciplines. Many continue to grow with educational and leadership programs that will enhance their skill sets. A growing number of public works agencies, such as the City of Winnipeg, put themselves through a vigorous accreditation program developed by the American Public Works Association that evaluates over 500 aspects of an agency's policies, procedures and practices and compares to recommended practices identified by nationally recognized experts in the field of public works.

CPWA Background and Our Members Professional Responsibilities

The Canadian Public Works Association has more than 2,250 members across Canada whose profession is the design, building, operation, management, maintenance and repair, replacement, and emergency management of our communities' infrastructure. CPWA is joined by our colleagues in the US to make our membership more than 29,000 strong and to promote the sharing of best practices across the border.

In Canada, CPWA works with other infrastructure stakeholder organizations on projects of importance, such as the 2012 and 2016 Canadian Report Cards for Infrastructure. CPWA works with the government and others to promote funding for infrastructure and the best in public works practices to deliver the best return on the investment in infrastructure. Contact CPWA through Anne Jackson, Canadian Advocacy and Outreach Manager at: ajackson@apwa.net