

The Pros and Cons of Specifications

The word “specifications” can mean many things to water utility personnel and manufacturers’ representatives. To the utility, specifications are a shield protecting it from inferior products or services and a statement as to what constitutes the minimum standards it expects from suppliers. To the quality conscious supplier, utility specifications offer protection from sub-standard competition or from competitors who might be tempted to offer lower priced “oranges” when “apples” are what the utility has in mind.

Specifications can have a negative connotation as well. They can be used as an excuse for avoiding decisions to upgrade to improved products based on new technology. They can be written to exclude certain manufacturers from bidding comparable products, thus stifling competition and increasing the utility’s costs. What can the utility do to insure that specifications are working for them?

1. Specifications should be regularly reviewed. Do the specs exclude new technology or do they reflect present “state of the art”? Are currently approved products performing as expected? Specifications should never be “cast in stone.”
2. A system for new product evaluation should be implemented. Every department that would be affected by the introduction of a new product should have a chance to evaluate it; committees aren’t the best means of reaching decisions, but they do have the advantage of bringing out all facets of a problem as well as a variety of opinions.
3. Specifications should not be too “loose” or too “tight.” Specifications should set the minimum standards of performance but should not exclude qualified suppliers due to excessive and unnecessary detail.



4. Don’t neglect manufacturers as a source of information and assistance in writing specifications. Established, reliable suppliers will often have drawings, engineering data and product performance records that can remove much of the burden of spec writing. Specifications are an important tool for utility management. They are not, however, a substitute for informed product evaluation, careful installation and inspection, and an ongoing re-evaluation of product performance under actual field conditions. The Ford Meter Box Company has been helping utilities find the right products for their distribution system needs for over 100 years. Let our experience help you design specifications you can point to with pride.

