

USG Water Solutions: A Total Solutions Provider for Water Asset Management



USG employees inspect a water treatment plant.

USG Water Solutions is the leading provider of water asset management services for small and medium-sized public water utilities in North America. It offers rehabilitation and maintenance services for water storage tanks, pipe networks, and concrete structures in water and wastewater plants. In this interview, Municipal Water Leader talks with Ryan Richardson, USG's new senior vice president of sales and marketing, about the company's individual and turnkey services.

Municipal Water Leader: Please tell us about your background and how you came to be in your current position.

Ryan Richardson: I grew up in Atlanta and went to Georgia Tech. After college, I started my career in the water industry, where I spent the next 18 years working with municipal and industrial customers, helping them solve their evolving water quality and compliance issues and aiding with operational process control. Then, for 3½ years, I was the North American services sales leader for Honeywell Building Technologies, a global leader in building process solutions. Last year, I returned to the water industry as the senior vice president of sales and marketing for USG. I am excited about how we can serve customers as a complete solutions provider in the ever-changing water industry.

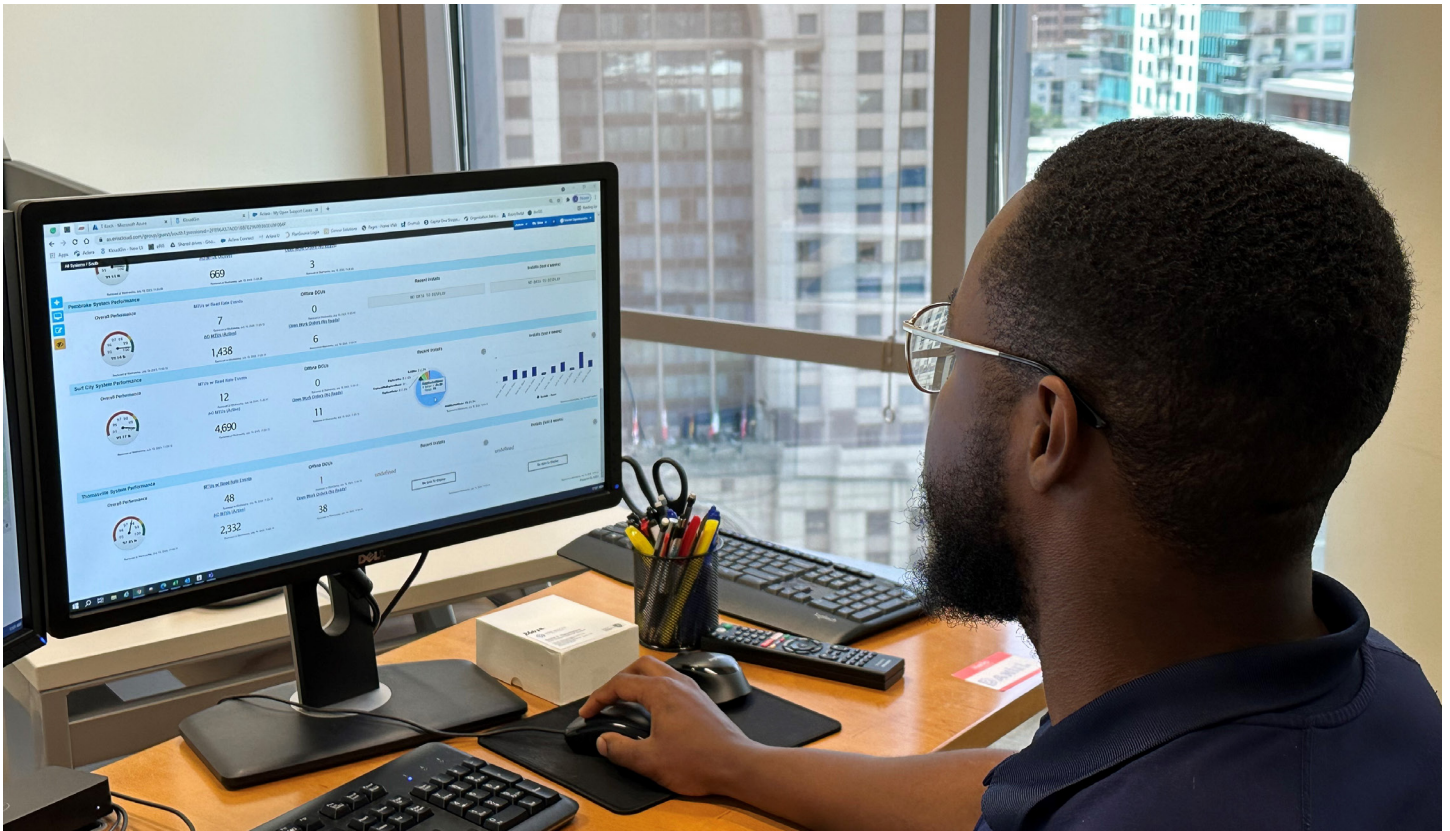
Municipal Water Leader: Please introduce USG Water Solutions.

Ryan Richardson: USG provides asset management and rehabilitation services to municipal and private water companies across the United States. We have over 600 employees working at our Atlanta headquarters; our operations center in Perry, Georgia; and our 11 service centers across the country.

Frank Shelton founded the company in 1963 to provide painting and maintenance services for municipal water storage tanks. In the 1980s, USG decided to launch a unique subscription-based asset maintenance program in which we renovate a tank, bring it up to all the necessary standards, and then maintain it regularly. We provide a lifetime warranty on coatings as long as the tank is enrolled in the program. Our subscription-based program also covers future renovations.

Large water systems have their own departments dedicated to asset management, so our market is generally small and medium-sized water systems across the country. With our services, they can trust that their assets are being kept up to date with the latest industry standards and properly maintained to meet all applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

Over the years, we've expanded our portfolio, and we now provide proprietary rehabilitation and maintenance solutions for any area of a water system. We are the only company in the United States that's able to service any water or wastewater asset. Our customers know that when they're doing business with USG, we are there for



After implementing a metering system for a client, USG can monitor the data that are generated and alert the client to any problems. USG can also provide reports and dashboards relating information on water consumption.

them every step of the way. As a total solutions provider, we can be their single source of consultative services. Our customers can pick up the phone and call us, knowing we are going to be able to help them with the challenges that they face.

We also apply the asset management approach that we pioneered for storage tanks to other infrastructure needs. One of our fastest-growing offerings today is our advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) program with asset management. We help a water system implement an AMI network and smart meters; we integrate them into the system's existing infrastructure for data collection and billing; and, as part of the program, we can also provide maintenance and supervision of the overall metering network over the life of the system.

Municipal Water Leader: Are all your customers on the subscription-based asset management program, or do you offer other models to your customers?

Ryan Richardson: We have solutions for any maintenance project, regardless of size and scope. In addition to our asset management program, we can perform work at whatever stage and scale our customers need. We can perform simple tasks such as washing out a tank or more complex tasks such as using a remotely operated underwater robot to do a quick yet detailed tank inspection. Or we can manage the long-term care of dozens of tanks for a larger water system.

Municipal Water Leader: Why do water departments need an asset management program?

Ryan Richardson: The list of states that require an asset management program grows every year. The New Jersey Water Accountability Act, for example, requires all utilities to have an asset management program for their pipes. The Alabama Environmental Management Commission recently amended its water supply program to require all new systems that want to produce water to submit a detailed asset management plan along with their permit applications. In Tennessee, utilities were eligible to receive American Rescue Plan Act funds only if they could demonstrate that they had a current asset management plan. Increasingly, customers need to demonstrate that they have a comprehensive program in place to be eligible for funding from various agencies.

Municipal Water Leader: Would you give a sense of the range of assets that you manage and rehabilitate?

Ryan Richardson: We can meet the maintenance needs of any area of a water system. We service steel and concrete tanks, but we can also rehabilitate pipe networks. We can clean and reline underground water mains without digging them out. We can also restore assets in treatment plants, including filters, clear wells, clarifiers, or any other steel or concrete structure. And, as I mentioned previously, we also install and maintain smart metering systems.



A USG employee atop an elevated water tank.

Our maintenance experts can also design custom programs and services to meet a customer's specific challenge or need.

Municipal Water Leader: Would you tell us more about your AMI program?

Ryan Richardson: We help customers select the metering equipment (the AMI network and smart meters) that best meets their needs, and then we install and maintain the overall system over its lifetime. Once the AMI network is deployed, our metering analysts monitor the metering data remotely on a daily basis. To put things into perspective, for a utility with a thousand customers, the data received can go from 10,000 reads per month with a manual or drive-by meter reading system to over 700,000 hourly reads per month with AMI. Most of our customers do not have the staff needed to monitor that amount of data. We can do that for them and alert them to any problems. We also provide them with reports and dashboards on water consumption so that they can make decisions based on accurate and timely information.

Municipal Water Leader: Would you give an example that illustrates the results that USG has provided a customer?



A USG employee cleans a steel water tank.

Ryan Richardson: It is hard to pinpoint only one. The City of Hodgenville, Kentucky, for example, used to assign 3–4 people to reading meters for an entire week every month. Since the implementation of its new AMI system, it has been able to save about 160 man-hours per month to devote to other projects. For the City of Concordia, Missouri, the biggest benefit of its new AMI system is the dramatic improvement in its customer service. Having hourly data on any account at the staff's fingertips allows the city to communicate with customers promptly about problems they might be experiencing. The AMI system helps detect water leaks quickly, which avoids billing disputes.

Municipal Water Leader: What is your vision for the future of USG?

Ryan Richardson: With our 2023 acquisition by Turnspire Capital Partners, we can continue to expand our sales organization and our geographic footprint and open additional service centers. It's exciting to be part of a company that is the number 1 infrastructure asset management solutions provider in the water industry in the United States. With all the proprietary and value-creation services that we provide for storage tanks, pipe networks, treatment plants, and metering systems, it's only up from here for USG and the customers we serve. We continue to monitor our industry for the latest trends and technology advancements in order to bring solutions to our customers to help them maintain their water and wastewater infrastructure today and anticipate the challenges of tomorrow. [M](#)



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