

State of Vermont Proclaims National Public Works Week

Introduction. Since 1960, members of the American Public Works Association (APWA) have promoted and sponsored “National Public Works Week.” Many states, provinces, cities, towns, and municipalities all across North America celebrate National Public Works Week with official government proclamations and resolutions to honor the public works departments within their own communities. This year, Governor Shumlin proclaimed May 15-21 as National Public Works Week in Vermont, and encouraged all Vermonters to recognize the contributions of our public works professionals, engineers, managers, and employees. (You can read the [official proclamation](#).) The third week in May is set aside as a time to energize and educate the public on the importance of public works in planning, building, managing, and operating the facilities and infrastructure essential to our daily lives.

Public Works Always There. This year’s theme, “Public Works Always There,” showcases the pervasiveness of public works in our communal lives, and our collective dependence on the men and women in our public works departments that are always ready to help. This year’s theme also illustrates the collaborative role public works personnel play in emergency management by providing vital services during prevention, response, and recovery operations. Every day, 9-1-1 emergencies are routinely handled by first responders across the nation. In these events, public works crews may be called on to repair broken water or sewer mains, close a roadway due to a traffic accident, or remove fallen branches and trees after a storm. Although our perception may be that emergency management activities only happen after an event, emergency management consists of four stages that reach far beyond the actual event. An APWA fact sheet titled “The Essential Role of Public Works in Emergency Management” describes the stages as:

- **Mitigation** (sustained actions to reduce or eliminate long-term impacts and risks), in which public works bears a majority of the effort.
- **Preparedness** (planning, training, and exercising). Public works is vital to ensure plans are comprehensive and exercises test the full response to an event.
- **Response** (including but not limited to assisting law enforcement with barricades, debris removal, traffic control, access control, etc.), in which public works primarily provides support functions.
- **Recovery.** Public works plays a predominant role assessing damage, clearing debris, and rebuilding and restoring lifelines in the community.

Public works also plays an important part in planning, constructing, maintaining, and operating a majority of a community’s protective and lifeline facilities such as its transportation networks, water and sewer, stormwater and flood controls, parks, playgrounds, and other public infrastructure.

Williston Public Works in Action. Lisa Sheltra, Williston’s Assistant Public Works Director, is also an executive director on the board of the New England Chapter of the APWA covering Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. She has been involved in promoting community education and outreach activities during National Public

Works Week for the past several years. From educating elementary school children about the variety of community services that public works offer – such as stormwater treatment and environmental protection – to planning for the future using multi-modal transportation, the Williston Public Works Department has been raising the awareness about the work it does during National Public Works Week since 2013. According to Sheltra, Williston will participate this year as well, but the specifics as of this writing have not yet been set in stone. Given this year’s state proclamation encouraging all Vermonters to recognize the contributions of our public works professionals, we can anticipate that interest in public works will continue to grow.

For more information about National Public Works Week, visit the [APWA website](#), where you can also learn how to become an [APWA member](#).

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