

# Connect People to the Value of Wastewater Services by Telling Personal Stories

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When I was in college, I spent a summer studying environmental issues in Southern India. We didn't have access to toilets or clean drinking water for most of the time. It was a humbling experience that influenced me to be an advocate for maintaining the infrastructure we are lucky to have and that many take for granted every day in the U.S.

On World Toilet Day, I took the time to look back at some of my photos and reflect on how the experience I had in India, and the experiences of others that I witnessed first-hand, are exactly why World Toilet Day exists.

Many of our messages surrounding our wastewater programs talk about "protecting public health" and "enhancing water quality." I think these messages are all too often lost upon the average American, because it's hard for us to imagine a day without a toilet or a wastewater system that takes our sewage to a faraway place. But I think sharing a personal experience with your friend, a neighbor, or even a key decision-maker helps connect these messages to reality and create a longer-lasting impact.

World Toilet Day is our chance to raise awareness about the very real issue of sanitation around the world, and it also serves as a humbling reminder that the work we do –

the daily conversations we have about the importance of maintaining our infrastructure – is important work.

*Image 1 (Left) - This is what a proper toilet and shower looks like in Southern India. Even this style toilet is generally found in the cities or the homes of the more affluent. Southern India is very rural, contrary to the typical image one might picture when thinking of such a populous country, and millions of people are forced to use nature (or public spaces) as their bathroom every day.*

*Image 2 (Middle) - Imagine walking out of your front door and stepping over an open sewer. These open ditches serve as "combined" sewers - carrying sewage, stormwater, garbage, and sometimes goats.*

*Image 3 (Right) - Many people live with two to three feet of water inside their homes for three months out of the year during monsoon season. This water is heavily polluted with sewage, garbage, toxic industrial pollutants, and even hospital waste.*

Many of the farmers who own these homes are well-educated and respected people, their community simply lacks the infrastructure necessary to protect their public health. 💧