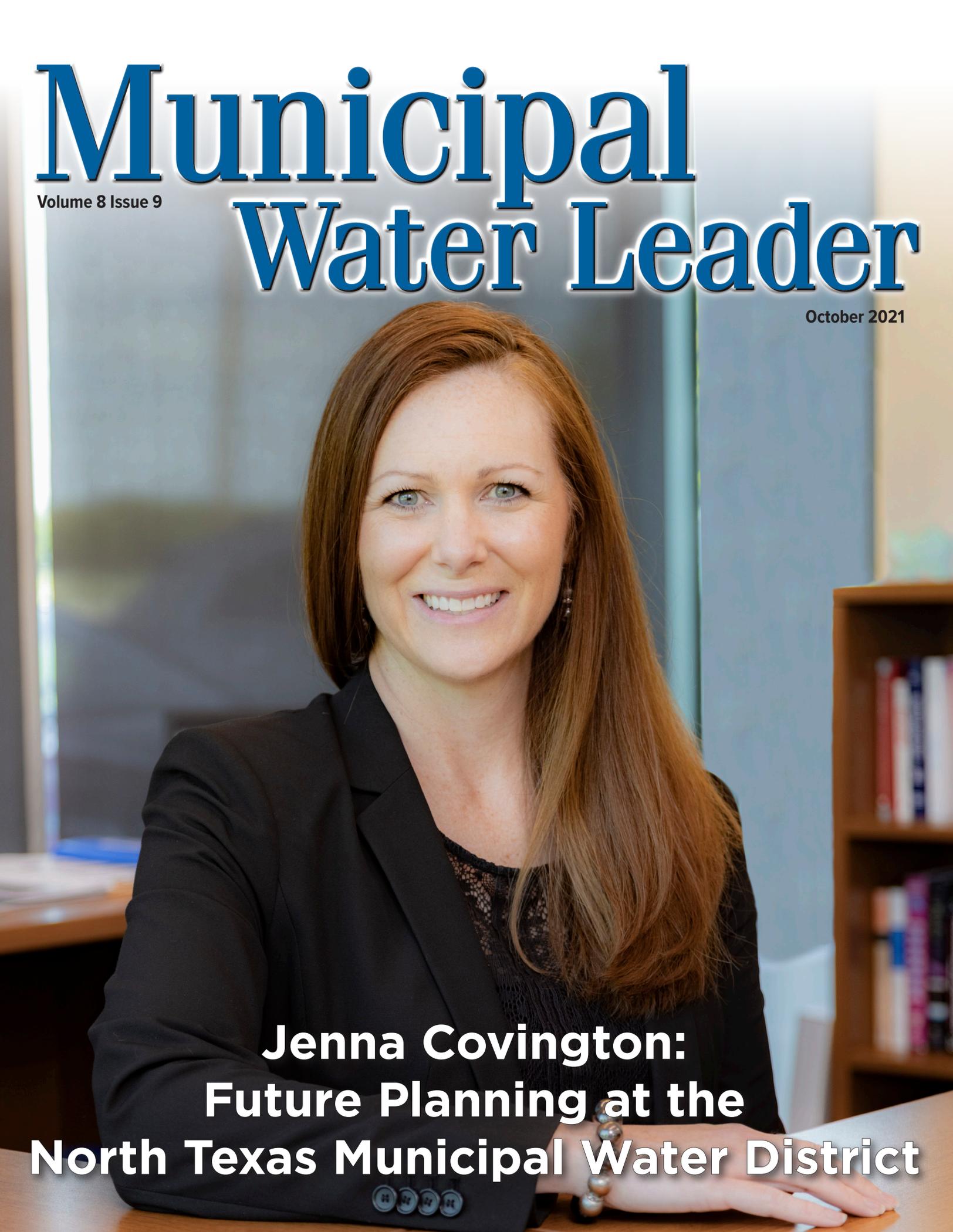


# Municipal Water Leader

Volume 8 Issue 9

October 2021

A professional portrait of Jenna Covington, a woman with long, straight brown hair and blue eyes, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black blazer over a black lace top. She is seated at a wooden desk with her hands resting on it. In the background, there is a blurred office setting with a bookshelf on the right containing several books.

**Jenna Covington:  
Future Planning at the  
North Texas Municipal Water District**



## 8 Jenna Covington: Future Planning at the North Texas Municipal Water District

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Do you have a story idea for an upcoming issue? Contact our editor-in-chief, Kris Polly, at [kris.polly@waterstrategies.com](mailto:kris.polly@waterstrategies.com).

# Municipal Water Leader

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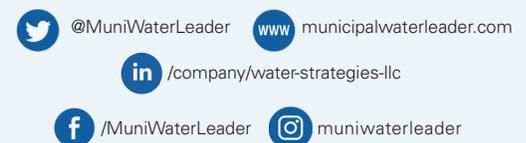
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### COVER PHOTO:

Jenna Covington, Executive Director and General Manager, North Texas Municipal Water District. Image courtesy of the North Texas Municipal Water District.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH TEXAS MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT

# James Dunning: Synergizing Innovation in the Water Sector at Syrinix

**B**ringing innovation to mature water infrastructure systems can be a significant challenge. New regulatory, environmental, and market factors all constrain the ability of water users to institute better and more effective management strategies. Syrinix is a company working to help them by providing products and technologies that can simultaneously address many different water management issues, including leak detection and pressure monitoring. In this interview, Syrinix's chief executive, James Dunning, tells Municipal Water Leader about the company's history and how its new products are addressing present and future water challenges.

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

**James Dunning:** I started off as a lawyer, moving in house quite early in my career, but I quickly found I preferred being the lead on a project to being the advisor, and I moved to more commercial roles. I started in the utility sector, working for a large electricity company, but when that company was taken over, I decided to go down a more entrepreneurial road, first in the renewable sector and then in the water sector. When I joined Syrinix, the company provided hardware solutions, but it was also a brand with a product that delivered solutions to clients in an exciting sector with real challenges. I've been with the company for 10 years, and I'm still loving it.

Today, I'm the chief executive, and I run the company on a day-to-day basis. A number of high-net-worth investors, known as angel investors, own the company. I deliberately try to run the company on a flat basis. Unless I create an environment where everyone feels comfortable putting forward a view and arguing their position, the system won't work and the company will not succeed.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Please tell us about the history of Syrinix.

**James Dunning:** It started as a project between the University of East Anglia and Thames Water, and it initially retained a heavy research bias. When I joined, the company was heavily hardware oriented, but it has since pivoted toward a much more solution-focused approach. We pivoted for two reasons.



Syrinix's PipeMinder-One Acoustic sensor, which combines leak detection and high-resolution pressure monitoring into a single unit.

First, utilities don't go to the market looking for a shiny box; they are looking for the solution to a problem. From a strategic point of view, there are also a lot of big beasts in the water sector supply chain that are good at providing cost-optimized solutions, so we knew we needed to be customer focused and go the extra mile to help support utilities.

**Municipal Water Leader:** How large is Syrinix?

**James Dunning:** We have 24 employees. Our base is in the UK, and we also have an office in Henderson, Nevada, just outside Las Vegas. We're finding that the U.S. market in particular is really gearing up for innovation; it is an important market for us. I think this was probably accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside revenue and climate change challenges, the age and state of infrastructure in the United States is now being acknowledged as a real problem.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Is Syrinix still primarily oriented toward hardware?

**James Dunning:** Today, there are three aspects to our business, the first of which is hardware. Hardware is central

to our business for two reasons. First, from a competitive point of view, if your hardware is attached to a pipe, no one else's can be attached to that pipe, or in any case it is much less likely. Our hardware also guarantees the quality of our data. However, what differentiates us are the other two elements of our business: data and advisory services. The way we present data to the user, providing automated filtering and configurable alarms, is important. We also make it easy to manage your units remotely, to move from unit to unit, to integrate our system with a SCADA system, and to import SCADA data into our system. We also provide additional advisory services to ensure that customers can focus on decisionmaking rather than data gathering.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Please tell us about some of your products.

**James Dunning:** Our business has always had two main areas. One is high-resolution precision leak detection. Our units are installed on a pipeline, which they automatically check every day. They filter out lots of extraneous noise from construction, planes, trains, and people and tell you precisely where there is a leak. That has been a successful part of our business.

The other side of our business, which has also been successful, is providing high-resolution pressure data. This is particularly important for the U.S. market, because sending regular pressure waves through your system can have much more negative effects on older pipes than on newer pipes. Our products provide precise pressure data to utilities that can show them how daily operations might be stressing the network and how to mitigate those stresses.

We're excited about the recent launch of our PipeMinder-One Acoustic, which combines those two areas of expertise into a single solution that covers both leak detection and pressure monitoring. That is cheaper than having two separate solutions. With the single solution, utilities can, first of all, deal with their number 1 priority: noticing leaks when they occur and, in this case, also being told precisely where they are. It is also critical in managing bursts. People refer to the hour after a major burst as the golden hour, and this solution can accelerate responses in that hour by 15–20 percent, since the system tells you where the burst is and which pipe to shut down. In addition to enabling that reactive management, this product also provides high-resolution pressure insights that can help explain what is contributing to and causing those leaks and bursts.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Where in a system are these devices placed?

**James Dunning:** Typically, we see the network split into different levels of criticality. The most important parts of the pipeline network will have permanent monitoring. The next level down will have more dispersed monitoring. For the least critical parts, the utility may just want to know

if a problem has occurred, rather than doing too much proactively. Our solutions can be deployed easily in all those systems, with users able to view units and configure alerting remotely as well. It's all automated.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Can a utility install the system by itself?

**James Dunning:** Everything is designed so that the utility can install it itself, though we can also provide in-field support during the initial installation. We actually do presite surveys of the locations where the units are going to be installed to make sure that there is a mobile phone signal and to check whether there are any health and safety concerns.

**Municipal Water Leader:** Do you market your products outside the UK and the United States?

**James Dunning:** Absolutely. The UK and the United States are our key markets, but we also work in Canada and Mexico, and we've just appointed a distributor in Chile. We have distribution in Australia and mainland Europe as well. Interestingly, we find that the biggest determinant of success is the external pressure being applied on the utility. For example, 5–6 years ago, California had quite a heavy drought. Suddenly, it needed to change. In the UK, it has happened because of changing regulations. Australia is a leading market just because of the terrific challenges it has with droughts.

It will be interesting to see how the sector responds to the pressures created by COVID-19 and the drought conditions in the United States. During the pandemic, for the first time ever, businesses shut down and everyone stayed at home. That changed the demands on the water network, and while this hasn't yet been statistically proven, a lot of utilities have commented that leaks and bursts went down. When the field crews started working on the network again, leaks and bursts started to go back up, and when businesses came back online at normal levels, they went up again. This shows that the way a network is used is a contributor to leaks and bursts. We see a big opportunity in partnering with utilities to help them deal with those leaks and bursts, but also to understand what causes them.

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

**James Dunning:** I am hugely engaged and energized by the sector and want to continue focusing on Syrinix's continued growth as a successful company. 



*James Dunning is the chief executive of Syrinix. He can be reached at [james.dunning@syrinix.com](mailto:james.dunning@syrinix.com).*