

# Don't Be Discouraged – There's Help For New Operators

In 2004 the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) contracted with the Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA) to assist public water suppliers that lose their only certified operator. The contract provides assistance and on-site training to new operators to help them in becoming certified.

Each public water supply is required to have an operator certified at the level required for their system. The classifications are Small System operator and then Class I through Class IV. To attain these certifications the requirements for eligibility are below:

Small System	12.5 points	6 months experience
Class I	13.0 points	1 year experience
Class II	14.0 points	1 year experience
Class III	16.0 points	2 years experience
Class IV	18.0 points	2 years experience

The points are accumulated according to the following:

- ◆ Each year of operating experience = 1.0 point
- ◆ High school graduation (GED or equivalent) – 12.0 points
- ◆ Each full year of college (30 hours credit) = 1.0 point
- ◆ Each department of approved education course (10 consecutive contact hours 0.25 points
- ◆ Successful completion of California State University correspondence courses (each volume) = 1.0 point
- ◆ Department approved semester courses (60 contact hours) = 1.5 points
- ◆ Department approved two-year environmental technology degree = 6.0 points

**The goal is to provide the new operator with information required to obtain certification and more importantly to ensure that the water system will continue to provide safe potable water to customers.**



Mike Sorensen shows the difference in color after the DPD reagent has been added to the sample.

After attaining certification, each operator must meet the minimum training requirements to hold certification. Small system operators need to acquire five hours of approved training every two years. Operators who hold a Class I through Class IV certification must acquire ten hours of approved training every two years.

## What does a new operator do?

First, when a system loses its only certified operator, KDHE must be notified that the former operator is no longer working for the system. The system needs to identify who the new operator will be and provide contact information to KDHE. The notice should be made to Vickie Wessel at 785/296-2976 or Teresa Schuyler at 785/296-5511 to inform the agency who the new operator is.

KDHE then contacts Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA) and requests the new person be contacted to determine if they are interested in emergency on-site assistance and training. The goal is to provide the new operator with information required to obtain certification and more importantly to ensure that the water system will continue to provide safe potable water to customers.

Does having an operator retire, quit, or be terminated cause a problem for water system? Yes, it can if there is not another person ready to step in and operate the system. If possible it is very beneficial to have another person certified to maintain a certified operator when the main operator leaves.



City of Durham Operator Mike Sorensen obtains the water sample for the daily chlorine residual testing.

**From January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2010, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment assigned fifty-five new “Operators In Training” to KRWA. What were the results?**

Passed Certification	23
Hired contract operator	7
Resigned or terminated	3
Declined assistance	2
Ongoing work as of 1-1-2011:	20

At present KRWA is working with twenty-five new Operators-In-Training (OITs). KRWA is providing guidance, training and assistance with operations as needed to assist the workers to become certified. KRWA is requested to visit each new operator at least monthly until the person becomes certified. Follow up documentation in the form of a letter is also required by KRWA, outlining what topics have been discussed; those letters are typically copied to the mayor or RWD chairman or other contacts. This also informs the governing body concerning the assistance that has been provided.

**Don't be discouraged about non-certification**

First, city council and RWD board members sometimes are of the opinion that they must hire an operator who already has attained certification with KDHE. Such concerns should be discouraged. If that approach were to continue, eventually there would be no additional operators. New operators should also not be discouraged because they do not know everything that is required of them. KRWA is there to help and will continue to do so as needed. KRWA has experienced staff available to assist new operators with any type of water system.

I encourage new operators to attend the 2011 Annual Conference and Exhibition in Wichita March 29 – 31. There are ten pre-conference sessions scheduled for Tuesday, March 29 beginning at 10:00 a.m. New operators will benefit from attending the “Water Wells: Understanding, Constructing And Maintaining The Investment” and the “VFD, PLC, MCC & SMC – Making Operators’ Jobs Easier”.

There are also forty-eight concurrent sessions on Wednesday, March 30 and Thursday, March 31 designed to benefit operators, administrative personnel and board/council members. Sessions for operators range from regulatory updates to sanitary issues associated with water towers. There is something for everyone to take home to help make the system better. There is also plenty of time allowed for visiting the 181 Associate Members in the 306 booths in Expo Hall to view the latest technology and information for water and wastewater systems.

*Greg Duryea has worked for KRWA since 1993 as Technical Assistant. He presently manages the Emergency Operator Program, with a variety of other responsibilities. He holds a Class I water certification and is the certified operator for Sycamore Springs Resort in Brown County.*



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