

# Budget Cuts Impact KRWA'S Training Program

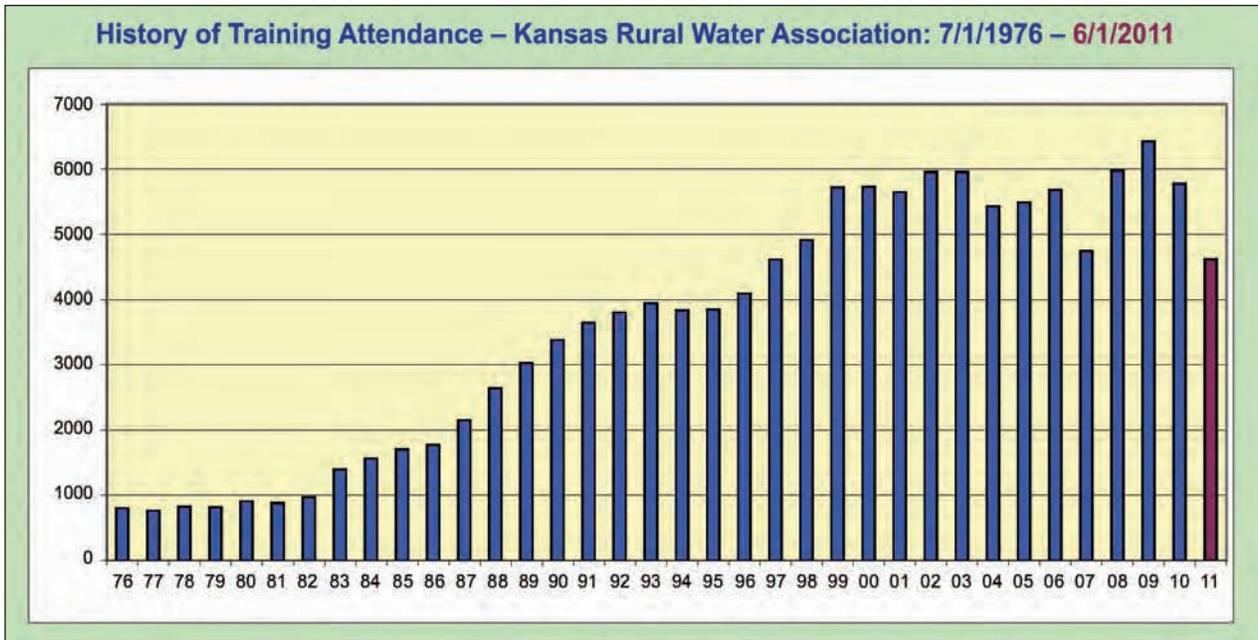
The Kansas Rural Water Association has been among the leaders in providing training for water and wastewater utilities in Kansas, particularly for the medium and smaller-sized systems and rural water districts. Although originally organized in 1966, it was not until the advent of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) in late 1974 that KRWA expanded training to make sure that operators and system managers, boards and councils and others would be aware of all the new requirements. While complying with regulations was one matter of concern, the new law also reflected the responsibilities of properly operating and maintaining public water systems. With funding through US EPA, the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) training and technical assistance program has provided significant support to enable KRWA to provide no-cost training sessions. The U.S. House of Representatives has decided that the program is an "earmark"; funding for program will end on August 31, 2011.

**While complying with regulations was one matter of concern, the new law also reflected the responsibilities of properly operating and maintaining public water systems as there was a growing reliance on systems by the citizens of Kansas**

## Some history

As a result of the new SDWA in 1974, KRWA joined with six other state rural water associations in forming the National Rural Water Association. Once formed, the NRWA explained to members of Congress that help would be needed to be made available if water systems were going to comply with the new SDWA. The help that the new NRWA sought was funding through US EPA to provide training across the U.S., mainly aimed at small systems. The first funding was approved in 1976.

Known as the "Training and Technical Assistance" contract, that program became central to allowing KRWA and other affiliate state associations of the NRWA to provide needed training for public water operators and others. Annually, Congress authorized the funding; sometimes that appropriation seemed in deference to budgets proposed by the agency. Having made many visits to Kansas Senators' and House Members' offices over the decades, it also seemed to me that out of the hundreds of millions and then billions of dollars that EPA had in its program budget, the agency ought to have been more



supportive to provide resources to the programs that helped provide safe drinking water and helped systems maintain compliance with regulations. Instead, annually, members of Congress inserted language to force the agency to fund the training and tech assistance program contracted to the NRWA.

Several years ago, that funding came under scrutiny due to it being classified as an “earmark”.

Unless you have tuned completely out of the recent political commentary in this country, some legislators now consider earmarks as completely unacceptable. And so, the recent budget bill that was passed did not include the funding for the water training and tech assistance program.

What does this mean for KRWA and systems in Kansas? Well, it presently means the annual loss of \$233,000 for KRWA to help fund the training program and a source water protection program. What that may end up meaning is that some of the training that has been without cost to systems since 1976 may have some charge associated with it in the future. The KRWA staff and board of directors will need to take the loss of program funding into account in KRWA’s budget.

KRWA’s mission statement reads: “To provide leadership, education, and technical assistance to public water and wastewater utilities to enhance the public health and to sustain Kansas’ communities.” There should be no doubt by anyone that KRWA will continue to provide training for water and wastewater utilities.

In 2010, nearly 6,000 people attended KRWA-sponsored or facilitated training sessions. The majority of that attendance was by operators. Since July 1976 to June 1, 2011, KRWA has conducted 1,881 training sessions that were attended by 129,451 people. While that may seem like bragging rights for the Association, the point is that people attend training because of the need to learn and also to attain and maintain certification – and KRWA has tracked every session it has facilitated.

Leadership and professionalism by KRWA involves more than doing something when there is funding to do it. It means KRWA must find ways to provide the training that is necessary to help systems meet their responsibilities. Continuing the training and source water protection programs will require KRWA to draw on some reserve funds. Like anyone’s personal or business budget, it also may mean increasing revenue to offset the costs. It also means that KRWA must manage costs as prudently as possible.

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The loss of this funding is going to be noticed. Meanwhile, the Association has received expressions of support from federal legislators for these programs. They appreciate that public water supply systems probably do more to protect the public health than any other activities. I do not believe that cutting training and tech assistance to

small water systems is going to reduce costs, much less improve public health. It certainly will not improve compliance with the regulations.

Joe Liles, President of the board of directors of the National Rural Water Association, addressed the Thursday, 3/31, luncheon at the 2011 KRWA conference in Wichita. His address discussed the efforts to retain funding for water system training and tech assistance. I encourage you to read the address, which is reprinted in this issue. In the meantime, keep checking KRWA’s Web site at [www.krwa.net](http://www.krwa.net) and then under “Training” for the latest in sessions that will be offered by KRWA.

*Elmer Ronnebaum is KRWA General Manager; he has been employed by KRWA since 1983. He served seven years on the KRWA board of directors prior to that. He also helped develop a large RWD and served for fourteen years on a water district board of directors.*

