

“Let’s Pull Together” to Maintain and Sustain Your Water System



This article is aimed generally towards water system operators, managers and board/council members. As small water system owners and operators you are the front line of the water delivery system. You have a vital role – with both the opportunity and responsibility – to help maintain the public health, welfare and safety of your community or rural area. Your job: do what needs to be done to maintain and sustain your city or rural water system.

The “opportunity and responsibility” I mention above is not without a truckload of challenges. But here are some questions. 1) Are you doing everything you can do as an operator, manager, council or board member to maintain your system for sound operations today as well as planning

ahead for future needs to provide safe water? 2) Is your board or council more concerned about “getting by” than by taking bolder steps to address problems that you know really need to be dealt with?

I know my words might sound like just more rhetoric – but I hope it doesn’t. I know and appreciate how it is becoming more and more difficult in many areas of Kansas for small systems to retain operators who are able to dedicate the time necessary from other work to take care of the small community or rural water system. I also see many council and board members who don’t seem to appreciate those who are trying to do everything necessary to keep the systems in good repair, much less plan

for the future. You cannot improve a water system by not considering any improvements. Life is not static and neither are most water systems.

It’s my opinion water and wastewater workers who are out in the trenches are not afforded the respect they deserve. That old way of thinking needs to change. Many people don’t realize what it takes to operate and maintain a small water system in a rural community these days. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) sets high standards for maintaining a system so that it can provide safe, clean water to the public. Don’t take me wrong, there are many system owners and operators who realize this and do what it takes to get things done, as they should, but there are so many others who are behind. It’s like if we pretend a problem doesn’t exist, we won’t have to deal with it.

You’re not in this alone

Since 1976, KRWA has been aggressively helping RWDs and cities by providing training sessions that meet the needs of operators, managers, administrative staff and certainly board/council members. KRWA has worked to develop and sustain programs that provide technical assistance to water and wastewater systems. The training ranges from special sessions for new operators, water right issues, compliance issues,



KRWA training sessions often include presentations by Associate Members. Associate Members provide products and services to utilities. Who better to discuss fire hydrant maintenance than the manufacturer’s representative? The hydrants are already in the ground; system owners and operators need to know how to properly maintain them.

water conservation, disaster response and a myriad of operational and maintenance issues.

Having worked for a city and been an operator for years I learned that planning, training, and a lot of hard work are required to maintain a water system and all the components that are needed to operate it. It's one thing to lecture about all the things that system owners and operators

should do – it's another whole matter to deal with the realities of the situations that many communities face.

KRWA facilitated 91 training sessions in 2012, plus the ten five-hour preconference and 48 concurrent sessions at the Annual Conference. These sessions were attended by 3,334 water and wastewater operators, 362 administrative personnel for cities and rural water districts, 391 board/council members and 1,603 private individuals as well as 121 regulatory agency personnel.

An operator has many duties that are critical to maintaining a system. These range from compliance issues, such as daily residuals and bacteriological sampling, to maintaining pumps, valves, hydrants, buildings and grounds, ordering supplies, maintaining equipment, ordering repairs as needed in emergency cases, and dealing with customer complaints. And don't forget the necessity of knowing about the new and ongoing regulations – and maintaining the

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necessary certification. Just operating the system is in itself a full time job in many cases. And we haven't yet touched on meter reading, billing, water rates, water rights, conservation and emergency plans, source water protection plans and ordinances and perfecting water rights. KRWA staff understand the limitations of local operators; that's why you'll often find the KRWA staff member in the ditch with the operator or working to repair a chlorinator. The greatest personal satisfaction I get is helping operators and others solve problems. I am just very pleased to be part of an organization that always does what it can to help.

To summarize, I hope that boards and council members and their staff have good communication about the challenges that systems face and also, that if there are improvements that are appropriate to consider, then go forward with a plan to develop an engineering report to see how feasible the project is. I'd say buy what you

need to and make sure you buy no more than that. In this era of historically low interest rates, now is as good of a time as any to at least study what your system needs.

See you at the Conference!

The upcoming KRWA Annual Conference & Exhibition provides a tremendous opportunity for everyone to learn about new technology and to share ideas. I want to especially point out

the board/council training that will be held on Tuesday, March 27. This training is being provided by Cain Consulting Group. Bob Fitch will be the presenter; they are based in the small town of Hawarden, IA near Sioux City; they bring a wealth of information that can help any board or council member be a better member of the team. Special sessions for city clerks, RWD office staff, 48 additional breakout sessions and the 309 exhibit spaces make the KRWA conference one of the best investments of time of all training opportunities available. I hope to see you in Wichita, March 26 – 28; it's a tremendous event.

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