

The Top 5 Concerns of Small Systems

Hello, my name is Monica Wurtz and I am the newest staff member of the KRWA team. This article is an opportunity for me to tell you about my background, why I wanted to work for KRWA, and what I consider the biggest concerns of small systems today.

My background

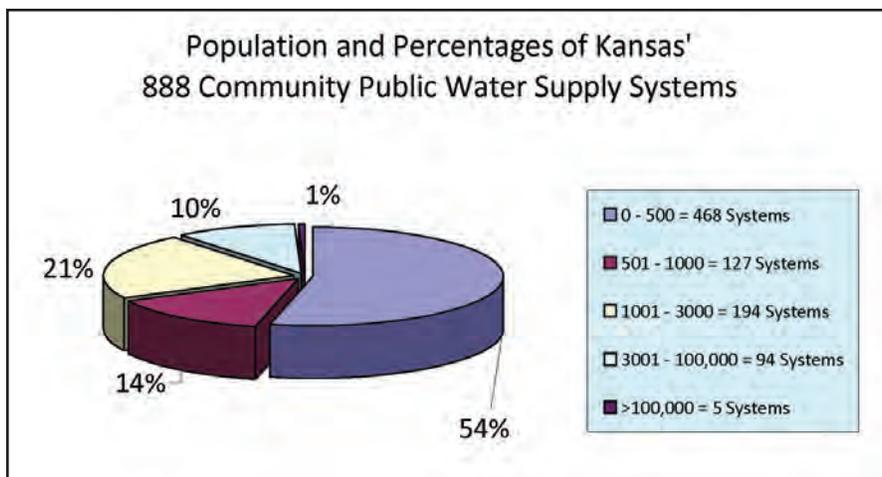
I grew up in a small Kansas town – Clyde, population approximately 715. Clyde is located in Cloud County, approximately 70 miles northeast of Salina. I graduated from Clifton-Clyde High School and attended Cloud County Community College (CCCC) in Concordia, Kansas. I received an Associate of Science from CCCC and I transferred to Kansas State University (KSU) in Manhattan, Kansas. (Go Wildcats!) At KSU, I received a Bachelor of Science in Physical Science and a secondary major in Natural Resources and Environmental Science (NRES). In order to attain the NRES major, I completed a capstone project which covered the issue of combined sewer overflows in the Kansas City metropolitan area. My work on this project made me realize the importance of the water and wastewater industry.

After graduating from KSU, I married my husband Travis, and I was hired by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 office in Kansas City, Kansas. I worked in the Drinking Water Management Branch where my first task was to

assist in the implementation of two new regulations – the Stage 2 Disinfectants and Disinfection Byproduct Rule and the Long Term 2 Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule. I formed a great working relationship with KRWA during this time. Together we were able to train hundreds of water operators on the early requirements of these rules at workshops throughout the state. I also presented at the 2007, 2008, and 2009 KRWA annual conferences. During my fourth year at EPA, I became the Kansas coordinator for the Public Water System Supervision grant program. I provided oversight of the funding granted to the Kansas

Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) to implement drinking water regulations in the state of Kansas.

After four years in the city, Travis and I were ready to move back home. We settled in a rural home outside of Aurora, Kansas and I found employment with KDHE at the North Central District Office in Salina. My job consisted of conducting solid waste and hazardous waste inspections in a 17 county area. Travis and I welcomed our daughter Remi in December of 2012. Then after nearly four years with KDHE, I was ready for a change. I really missed working with water programs and I wanted to do more with my regulatory knowledge than



This chart shows the high number of small systems in Kansas. Of the total of 888 public water systems, 54 percent or 468, serve populations less than 500 people.

Source: 2011 Annual Compliance Report, KDHE

implementation and enforcement. That's when an opportunity with KRWA arose. When I read KRWA's mission statement: *To provide leadership, education, and technical assistance to public water and wastewater utilities to enhance the public health and to sustain Kansas' communities*, I thought it was right in line with what I wanted to do. I wanted to be of more assistance to small communities, like the one I grew up in.

Top Five Concerns of Small Systems

In order for me to be of assistance to small systems, I thought I should identify areas that I consider most critical to the water and wastewater industry and discuss ways KRWA can offer support.

#5: Compliance: Whether it's shipping off samples to the laboratory, keeping track of all those records, or participating in a sanitary survey, small systems are definitely concerned about being in compliance with state and federal regulations.

#4: Qualified Operators: For many small systems, the day-to-day tasks are handled by one or two operators. These operators usually have many years of experience and some are approaching retirement age. Not only do these operators know the quirks that are unique to their systems and the quick fixes that keep them up and running, they are also dedicated to the communities that they serve. For these reasons, small systems are concerned with losing these valuable operators and finding new employees that not only have the ability to obtain certification from KDHE, but also have the desire to provide the same level of service (or better) to their customers.

#3: Infrastructure: Some small systems in Kansas are more than 100 years old. Over time, pipes, pumps, towers, and facilities used for treating and transporting water have started to decay. Many small systems are faced with the decision of continuing to repair their deteriorating systems or

Whether it's training to help keep your system in compliance and operators certified, or working with a consultant to identify the improvements that your system needs and the financial tools available to make those improvements affordable – KRWA offers these services.

make major capital improvements. Which brings us to #2 . . .

#2: \$: Isn't everyone concerned about money? With the rising costs associated with treatment chemicals, electricity, equipment, etc., it is getting harder and harder for small systems to provide a quality product at what the customer considers an affordable price.

#1: Public Health and the Environment: This topic might not be at the forefront of each small system owner/operator's mind, but at the end of the day, their #1 concern is to

provide water that is safe to drink and to remove contaminants from water released to the environment.

This isn't a comprehensive list by any means, but if your system has any of these concerns, KRWA will help find a solution. Whether it's training to help keep your system in compliance and operators certified, or working with a consultant to identify the improvements that your system needs and the financial tools available to make those improvements affordable – KRWA offers these services. That's why I'm glad to be a part of the team! I can be reached by email at monica@krwa.net or through the KRWA office.

Monica Wurtz began work with KRWA in October 2013. She previously worked at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and also worked at US EPA Region 7 for four years. Monica is considered a national expert on various drinking water regulations.



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