

USDA Rural Development Introduces Online Loan Application

USDA Rural Development has unveiled a NEW APPLICATION process known as RDAPPLY. The new program was demonstrated for the first time at the recent National Rural Water Association annual conference held in Oklahoma City. This new on-line process will allow potential borrowers (water and wastewater and other utilities) to go on-line to <http://rdapply.sc.egov.usda.gov> to register for an “eAuthorization” and once approved by USDA Rural Development, the applicant can then enter their application for water or wastewater projects to the USDA Water and Environmental Program (WEP).

As technology continues to evolve, many people requested electronic filing from USDA Rural Development. USDA staff have been looking for ways to streamline paperwork and filing. Also as retirement of personnel increased and budgets were cut, USDA needed to reduce key-entry work taken on by loan specialists across the country. The National Association of Support Personnel (NASP) approached Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk, Assistant Administrator for WEP and Scott Barringer, Deputy Assistant administrator WEP, and asked for help in reducing loan file sizes and the amount of time required to input applications into the Commercial Programs Application Processing (CPAP) system. The suggestion was also then actively promoted within USDA. The WEP leadership wanted to streamline where possible, reduce processing times and offer modern services to Rural Development's customers. So it just made good sense to pursue electronic filing.

Sometimes things line up and great things can happen. For the Water Programs at Rural Development, that is exactly what happened. In June 2013, former Administrator John Padalino made sure funds were put aside to get an intake system built for all of the Rural Utility Service programs. Assistant Administrator Ponti-Lazaruk had developed a clear vision for electronic filing in WEP and was eager to make it a reality. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) had begun its effort to upgrade RD systems and databases. The Water and Environmental Programs, traditionally a leader on the automation front, was ready to begin the process and formed a team that has seen the project through from concept to requirements,



development and now implementation. Many high expectations were riding on the shoulders of the Deputy Assistant Administrator Scott Barringer, as the lead on the project for WEP. Failure was not an option, and neither was creating a system that the customers would not find easy to use or beneficial.

In September 2013 USDA RD acquired contractors to being the development of the software. In the November 2013, USDA Rural Development team began the “constructing” of the RDAPPLY Web site. The team consists of: Scott Barringer, Lead team member, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Rural Utility Services Water & Environmental Services; Kent Evans, Team Member, USDA RD Water Program’s Director; Jim Wehrer, Team Member, USDA RD Community Programs Specialist; Hal Nielson, Team Member, USDA RD Community Programs Specialist; Christie McReynolds, Team Member, USDA RD Community Programs Specialist; James Fritz, Team Member, USDA RD Community Program Specialists; and, Ben Shuman, Team Member, USDA RD-RUS-WEP Engineer.

The target was to launch RDAPPLY on October 1, 2015 but the team was eager to get RDAPPLY out there so they worked nights and weekends to deliver RDAPPLY three days early on September 28, 2015 at the National Rural Water WaterPro conference in Oklahoma City, Okla. Team members Barringer, McReynolds, Wehrer and Nielson set up an RDAPPLY lab in Oklahoma and demonstrated the

application process as well as helped applicants and Circuit Rider’s sign up to use the new service.

Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk, Assistant Administrator, Rural Utilities Service, Water and Environmental Programs commented as follows: “USDA is very pleased to be able to offer our customers the convenience of electronic filing for water and

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