

KRWA Staff Gain Proficiency at NRWA In-Service Training



While the Kansas Rural Water Association encourages water and wastewater operators, managers, administrators, and board and council members to attend training sessions and the annual conference, I thought I would take this opportunity to explain that KRWA staff also attend training. Yes, the training is a requirement of the contracts administered by the National Rural Water Association – but KRWA hopes that those staff who attend see it as more than being a requirement. KRWA cannot send all its staff off to a NRWA-sponsored training event for four days. Other staff have been able to attend specialized training such as on chlorinator repair, meter testing, etc., and such opportunities are always considered.

Like local communities, employee development is a way that employers

can keep employees engaged at work to prevent what otherwise might turn into boredom. Interesting training programs, and future events that are fun or challenging to look forward to help encourage workers to do as well as possible. And I think that's the reason that KRWA-sponsored training sessions have such high attendance. People attend training sessions because they know and respect the organization sponsoring the sessions and have confidence in the presenters because they have experience.

I asked KRWA's six staff members to report what they participated in or learned at the recent in-service held in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I thought that readers might like to see the level of topics that the KRWA staff participated in.

Circuit Rider Jon Steele reported attending a session concerning the requirements to use American Iron and Steel. This isn't a new provision as it's been incorporated into some lending programs for many years. However, USDA Rural Development recently implemented the requirement. Jon reports also attending classes on diagnosing wastewater lagoon problems, how lagoon chemistry changes throughout the day and different times of the year and the importance of record keeping and how to monitor these changes for optimizing performance. Electrical training sessions that Jon attended discussed how to properly read and interpret motor nameplates along with electrical

safety and arc flash safety. VFD drives were discussed as were proper grounding, wire sizes and types, heat dissipation and other operating environment concerns. Other sessions addressed VFDs and programming.

Circuit Rider Rita Clary also attended the sessions on American Iron & Steel and noted that these requirements under USDA Rural Development are very similar to the State Revolving Loan programs funded through EPA. Because Rita's work at KRWA involves working with as many as three dozen communities on funding application and attending to the documentation required for the applications, she noted that the certification requirements by contractors and the engineer mandate that the certificate must accompany all payment disbursements for project. Other aspects of the training included the Electronic Preliminary Engineering Report (ePER) as the latest innovation to help applicants.

Rita also presented at the NRWA in-service because she is noted nationally as someone who is very proficient with the use of RD Apply – USDA's online funding application process. Rita gave tips and easy ways to include additional documents to help the loan applicant and RD Specialists. Scott Barringer and Christie McReynolds, formerly with Kansas USDA and now with USDA, Washington, DC, are part of team that helped develop and now provide training for RD Apply. Scott and Christie were also present to assist with this session.

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After the session, Rita, Scott and Christie registered approximately a dozen in-service attendees from other states in eAuthorization. Other sessions Rita attended concerned NRWA's "online log tracking" and a lesson to improve photography skills. Another session discussed use of drones in the water and wastewater industry. Other sessions Rita attended included sustainable management strategies presented by John Schwartz, USA BlueBook. John gave some good approaches on how to encourage people to attend the training and how to involve more board/council members.

KRWA staff learned that USDA Rural Development has:

- ❖ 7,753 borrowers
- ❖ 16,1003 loans
- ❖ \$12,503,659,666 outstanding principal
- ❖ USDA maintains a delinquency rate well below one half of one percent (< 0.5%)

Circuit Rider Doug Guenther

reported that he attended a session on ways to improve photography, a session on electric motor template interpretation and the need to have a code book to fully utilize the information. Doug also attended the sessions on variable frequency drives and learned more about the calculations of electrical savings. And he enjoyed the class on use of drones in water and wastewater systems. Doug says he learned that all the concern over disinfection byproducts was because two rats contracted cancer because of being fed mega doses of TTHMs but that is some speculation that kidney disease in men, especially in third world countries, may be linked to disinfection byproducts.

Wastewater Tech Charlie

Schwindamann learned that EPA will be sending a survey to all publicly-owned treatment works this fall. This survey is to obtain nationwide data on nutrient removal. The intent is not to set limits for nutrient removal. They studied many treatment plants around the U.S. and about five in Kansas including Clay Center and Colwich. In a class on wastewater lagoons, Charlie learned a

few new ways to review if treatment is working well. Charlie also sat in on the utility finance certification training where rate setting procedures were discussed.

KRWA Source Water Specialist Ken Kopp reported that the Source Water Protection Specialists took a day trip to the Tulsa Port of Catoosa, the largest ice-free inland port in the United States. This was in addition to those staff members attending the variety of other training session topics. A report on the Tulsa Port of Catoosa is printed in this issue of *The Lifeline*. The port and its lock and dam system are located on the Verdigris River, northwest of the city of Tulsa. Headwaters for the Verdigris River are in Kansas. Its confluence with the Arkansas River is a short distance downstream from the port, which allows water transport from the Tulsa area, along the McClellan-Kerr waterway, to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Due to the greater controls on streamflows through upstream dams on the Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers, the Tulsa Port of Catoosa is often more desirable for shipping than the Missouri River.

Source Water Specialist Doug Helmke reports that he was reminded of Oklahoma's Blue Thumb Program (<http://www.bluethumbok.com>), which the Oklahoma Conservation Commission manages. The program once encouraged Oklahoma residents to understand and practice water conservation, efficient irrigation, use of rain barrels, etc. It appears to be how Oklahoma tries to control non-point source pollution. He also learned that Minnesota has a program (<https://www.mda.state.mn.us/awqcp>) that allows farmers to have their operations reviewed for compliance with existing ag chemical use, etc. If the entire operation meets certain thresholds, the operation can be "certified" and exempted from any new regulations for a period of ten years.

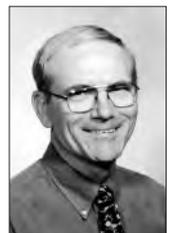
KRWA Tech Assistant Monica Wurtz found the most valuable part of the in-service was the day and a half Train-the-Trainer session. The session

was lead by excellent trainers from several other state rural water associations. She learned different training techniques to help make presentations interesting and creative. She also learned about some of the challenges other trainers have faced and ways to overcome them. We also discussed ways to be more accommodating to attendees with disabilities. This session gave me some new ideas for training topics and more importantly, ways to help me improve as a trainer. She also attended three sessions lead by representatives from the U.S. EPA concerned water contamination emergencies, overview of the Revised Total Coliform Rule, and a new EPA Workforce Tool.

Addressing weaknesses

Most employees, whether at KRWA or in a local community, have some weaknesses in their workplace skills. I know that I do. As such, the topics that I'm interested in are not the same as those Lonnie Boller or Tony Kimmi or Laurie Strathman or Greg Duryea might be interested in – or even need to be. Regardless, training opportunities help strengthen the skills that each employee has. The goal is to have an overall knowledgeable staff with employees who can take over for one another as needed, work on teams or work independently without constant help and supervision from others. Similarly, if your water district or city have interest in a particular training topic or have any suggestion for training, please let someone at KRWA know – and KRWA will work to provide experienced persons to provide that training. And typically, that is without cost or any requirement to be a member of the Association.

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.