

It's Time to Get Serious About Helping Water and Wastewater Operators



Bill Saunders with Sensus Metering Systems, Inc., Godfrey, Illinois, took the classroom to the field for some practical hands-on training at a KRWA-sponsored session. This training session was held in Mayetta last August. It was attended by 50 operators representing 32 different water systems.

It is good to be back working for Kansas Rural Water Association. I am excited to be back traveling around the state helping rural water districts and cities in any way I can. In the past I mainly focused on helping operators and crews with water loss, leak detection, valve locating and exercising, chlorination

along with compliance and training new operators. Often I was the “extra guy to help” especially in many RWDs and smaller cities that only have one operator. I guarantee anyone, it’s a lot easier (and safer) when two people work on installing a fire hydrant or replacing a 6-inch gate valve.

A new area for me is that I am now also trained to the extent I can be available to help a system that is considering submitting an application for loan or grant funds. No, that’s doesn’t make me a “grant writer” – but I do know something about water and wastewater systems and I’m familiar with the agencies that operate funding programs and I know the application processes. It’s often more important to help the local governing bodies first determine what their project is. Too often, board/council members ask, “How much grant money can we get?” And that’s before they decide even what project they are going to do as they haven’t determined what is really needed. Feel free to contact me any time if I or anyone else at KRWA can be of help in discussing your potential projects.

Valve exercising and rejuvenation is one of my specialties. I have helped several systems locate and exercise valves. Some of these valves have not been touched for years. Too many communities, especially smaller cities, rely on the one valve at the base of the storage tank to operate when there’s need for a repair somewhere in the

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system. That puts the entire town out of service to make what in cases may be a minor repair.

Lack of valve exercising is now a “Deficiency”

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) is now recommending that water system valves be operated at least once a year. That’s been the industry standard also. But here’s what is now changed. If the valve exercising program is not documented, KDHE will issue a minor deficiency during their inspections for not having this done – and the system is given 30 days to correct the “deficiency”. The goal of KDHE is for systems to be able to better isolate sections of the water system when there is a leak – and to avoid having to issue a boil advisory as well as reduce the number of customers being out of service while the leak or problem is being repaired. Valve exercising is one of those things that seems to always get put on the back burner. But operators for systems who do it will be glad they did. Be sure to catch one of our training sessions on valve exercising

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and line flushing. You can also find a valve exercising spreadsheet on the KRWA website under “Online Resources” and then “Downloads”.

On another topic I would like to take a minute to review is the role of the water or wastewater system operator. The issue is that many systems seem to have is retaining or finding good operators. The water and wastewater operator has a huge responsibility to keep the water we drink safe. Operators have many responsibilities including knowing and complying with sampling periods, various regulations much less keeping up with all the day-to-day duties of helping a water or wastewater system running smoothly and efficiently. One of the problems in retaining operators is that the pay scale is too low. In many smaller towns and

rural water districts, the pay scale does not reflect the responsibilities and requirements of the job. Cities and RWDs spend good money getting an operator trained and many times see that person then move on to a higher paying job. It’s way past time to see the job of a water or wastewater operator to be held as a higher end career and the pay needs to reflect that. We can live without a lot of things but we can not live without water.

I and other KRWA staff are ready, willing and able to help on any water or wastewater utility issue. Give a call or send an email and a response will come – not tomorrow – but today. And to keep up with training and technology and other information, check out the wealth of information at www.krwa.net.

Greg Metz joined KRWA as a Technical Assistant in July 2009. He previously worked at the city of Washington for 13 years where he was involved in city utilities including the power plant, streets, water and wastewater. He also served as purchasing agent for those utilities.



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