

Kansas Rural Water Association Cancels 2021 Conference and Exhibition

It is after much deliberation that the Board of Directors of the Kansas Rural Water Association has decided that the 2021 Annual Conference and Exhibition, normally held during the last week of March, will be canceled. The many unknowns concerning the COVID-19 virus preempt the Association from planning such a large event at this time. The annual conference serves as a bellwether for water and wastewater utilities – but an event of this size, with an estimated 2,200 people in attendance cannot turn on a dime. Months of planning, preparation and organization are involved, and there are just too many factors that could stand in the way.

Some of the factors involved in the decision include the following:

1. Health and safety: First and foremost, the concern for the health and safety of anyone who would attend a large indoor event is paramount. While no one wants to be exposed to the potential for the virus, those who are 65 years of age or older and those with underlying health issues are especially at risk and would not want to be exposed to those who may be asymptomatic.

2. Essential Workers: People who attend the conference from communities large and small across Kansas and some surrounding states, are ESSENTIAL WORKERS. In many communities there are already too few utility workers. The risk of having so many of these heavily depended-on persons gathered at one event with the potential spread of the virus would border on malfeasance.



KRWA will continue to plan for a conference in 2022 with the theme, “Making Every Drop Count”.

3. Potential Size of Event

Limitations: The potential is there for required limitations on the size of crowd allowed at the Century II Convention Center and also the inability of the Hyatt to serve food to large groups. The size of crowds allowed falls under the jurisdiction of Sedgwick County. For all our best efforts, that one point could, as it did in 2020, put a halt to the event.

Filling the void . . .

One of the many aspects of the KRWA annual conference is to offer operator training.

The KRWA conference typically provides a vast amount of the annual certification credits for both water and

wastewater operators. With the approval of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, KRWA has been conducting online training for both water and wastewater operators. KRWA will be hosting numerous simulcast events of in-person training sessions so that water and wastewater staff members can be updated on regulations, operation and maintenance issues, etc.

The Annual Awards . . .

It is my hope that KRWA will proceed with making annual awards to water and wastewater utility workers in 2021. The Association would likely be able to arrange an in-person presentation at local city council meetings or rural water board meetings to go along with congratulatory announcements, including photos and biographies, via the Internet and, as always, in *The Kansas Lifeline* magazine and website www.krwa.net. The pandemic should not prevent recognition of the good work of these dedicated people.

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Summary of Virtual Training by KRWA as of October 1

KRWA has been using the online platform, GoToWebinar, to deliver virtual training sessions under a pilot study that was initiated by KDHE in May 2020. The pilot study allows training providers to conduct live, virtual training for operators to receive credit hours towards certification renewal. Through the use of GoToWebinar, KRWA trainers are able to send out training notification electronically (via email), and participants can register for the online sessions. During the actual training event, participants are able to view and download the trainers' slides and submit questions or comments to the trainer.

KRWA's trainers are able to view a list of participants who have joined the webinar, view and answer incoming questions, launch polling questions to all participants to keep everyone engaged, and view the attentiveness of each participant. If a participant opens up another window or web browser over the top of the webinar, the trainers can see that the participant is no longer attentive. Following the webinar, the portal GoToWebinar creates a report that summarizes the participants and their level of engagement. KRWA then shares that report with KDHE. GoToWebinar also maintains a library of KRWA's recorded webinars. These can be made available to anyone who requests them, however, KDHE will only grant credit hours to those who view live training events.

The table below shows the virtual sessions that KRWA has conducted from May 12 to October 1, 2020. Additional virtual training is being planned with the first "simulcast" of in-person training to be on November 17. The session is entitled Pumps, Flowmeters and Energy Efficiency and will be presented by Tyler Engebretson and Eric Mixon with Pumps of Oklahoma and Jeff Flathman, President of Energy Solutions Professionals.

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Topic	Hours	Attendance
Regulatory Update, Leak Detection & Valve Exercising	2.5	23
Chlorination & Hydrant Maintenance	2.5	26
Safety Training for Water & Wastewater Operators (Part 1)	2.5	51
Safety Training for Water & Wastewater Operators (Part 2)	2.5	46
Equipment Repair & Replacement Scheduling	2.5	61
O&M for Water and Wastewater Operators	2.5	58
Safety Training for Water & Wastewater Operators (Part 1)	2.5	89
Safety Training for Water & Wastewater Operators (Part 2)	2.5	87

Looking to the future . . .

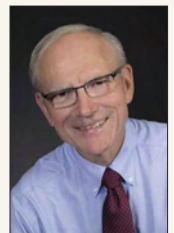
The Kansas Rural Water Association annual conference is recognized by many people, not just in Kansas but across the U.S., as one of the best conferences for water and wastewater utilities. We all hope and pray that the COVID-19 pandemic will be under control as soon as possible and that by the year 2022, people will be able to travel and meet without fear of jeopardizing their health and health of others.

While we lament the cancellation of the 2020 and now the 2021 conferences, KRWA will try to turn lemons into lemonade. Just think if Santa had more than a single year to plan for his annual trip, what wonders he might produce. That thought can be our guide for shaking things up and taking the conference to a whole new level in 2022.

Kansas Rural Water Association office, staff and board of directors want to hear from KRWA membership and others what thoughts anyone might have on what we can add, can improve, can plan for, that will make our long-awaited reunion in 2022 utterly remarkable? What can KRWA go to work on to make for an astounding experience?

In the meantime, in March 2021, join others on the Kansas Rural Water Association Website to see "2021 Conference on the Cloud Retrospective, KRWA 50+ Years and Counting – A Preparation for the Big 2022 Reunion". And, set your calendars for March 29, 30 and 31, 2022 Kansas Rural Water Association Conference and Exhibition – Making Every Drop Count!

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.