

# New Operators – Where Do You Begin?

**A**cross Kansas, people are taking jobs with cities and rural water districts as water operators. Some new operators will have other operators to learn from and others will be learning their systems on their own. Knowing where to start for most operators can be overwhelming and a bit scary. Some systems are relatively complex and others are simpler to understand. Either way, it takes time to learn and understand how the underground components and the facilities work to deliver water to the customers' taps. The best advice is to be patient and don't be afraid to ask for help.

The closest resource is sometimes the operator at a neighboring system. Networking with other operators helped me tremendously when I was a new operator. What I have found is most operators are more than willing to take new operators under wing to assist them and pass along any knowledge they have about the system. A local contractor that has done a lot of work for a district or city can also be a beneficial source of information.

Another resource may be a previous operator who may have retired from the district or city but still lives in the community. The Kansas Rural Water Association has a staff with more than 600 years of direct experience working with water and wastewater systems. KRWA's mission is to provide tech assistance and training. I and other staff are ready, willing and able to help any operator. I can be reached by phone at 785-219-1990 or by email at kris@krwa.net.

The recently-developed KRWA Apprenticeship Program is another avenue for new water operators to

obtain standardized professional training to help ensure they get the knowledge and skills to succeed. For questions regarding the program contact Monica Wurtz by emailing her at monica@krwa.net. Also, check out the article and promotional page about the Apprenticeship Program in this issue.

As a new operator keeping up with daily duties while trying to learn the water system is a challenge. Every operator will find his or her own way of doing things and some methods will be more efficient and organized than others. Sometimes just picking a manageable task and completing it will give the operator the confidence to tackle the next challenge. A few things to get started with is to review any records from the previous operator such as maintenance reports, valve exercise programs, daily logs, and maps of the system. Reviewing maps and finding isolation valves is the key to being prepared when the next water leak occurs. Good record-keeping practices help take some of the guesswork out of how a system should

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## www.krwa.net

The KRWA website at [www.krwa.net](http://www.krwa.net) is an excellent source of information for training and contacts to others including suppliers and consultants. In case you have not visited the site, check out all the tabs under "Online Resources". There you will find a system directory, RWD maps, and much more.

The screenshot shows the KRWA website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: ABOUT, ONLINE RESOURCES, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING, CONFERENCE, and MEMBERSHIP. Below the tabs, there are several sections:

- In the News:** A list of links including Legislative News, Weekly E-News, RWD Maps, Systems Directory, Wateringhole, Job Postings, Web Services, City Rates, RWD Rates, Lifeline Magazine, and Clarifier Newsletter.
- THE LATEST NEWS:** A featured article titled "E-News for Jan 24, 2022" with a sub-headline "KGS to Study the Factors of Successful Groundwater Conservation Programs". The article text mentions researchers from the Kansas Geological Survey (KGS) at KU.
- Register for Training Sessions:** A calendar for February 2022 showing training sessions. The calendar has columns for Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, and Sat. Sessions are indicated by blue bars on the dates.
- Which Rural Water District Am I In?:** A section with a "District Address" field and a "Who Do I Call?" button.

The KRWA training trailer has a multitude of equipment and parts that will be found in everyday use, construction and maintenance of a water distribution system or a wastewater collection system and plant operation.

These include the following: a variable frequency drive, that controls a pump through a simulated distribution system; a set up so people can see the injection of gas chlorine; peristaltic pumps, chlorinator heads; several chlorine analyzers and piping to demonstrate live tapping of pipelines. There is also lab testing equipment, a cutaway of a fire hydrant and an array of fittings and connections that are commonly used in both water and wastewater systems. Several KRWA Associate Members have donated equipment in addition to that which was purchased by KRWA.



be or is operating. Monthly water loss reports can be used to determine when to start looking for leaks that are not yet visible. As so often stated, water meters are the cash registers for the system. If they are not registering accurately, the district or city will lose out on much-needed revenue. Ensuring system master meters are tested for accuracy and customer meters are on a replacement program is essential. The operator should inspect all facilities and make a list of needed maintenance. This will chart a path and give

direction for future repairs and upgrades. Making a plan and budgeting for improvements allows the system to work for the operator versus the operator constantly worrying about the next failure. I have learned that improvement projects typically take a long time to plan and complete, but they are always worth it in the end.

I know at times being a worker for a local water district or city may seem like a thankless job. I'm here to say "Thank You!" to all the men and women across Kansas who help

provide water to their communities. After all, when safe water comes out of the tap, life is good for everyone, even though it takes a lot of effort to make sure it's available.

*Kris Kline began work with Kansas Rural Water on September 30, 2021.*

*He previously was Director of Utilities at Osage City, Kan. and also had 12 years of experience as Operation's Manager at Osage RWD 8.*



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