

The other shoe will always drop – so be ready!

Over the past few months, other KRWA staff and I have dealt with many emergency calls from systems. These range from power outages, well pump failures, chlorine leaks, chlorinator failures and water main breaks. Several of the chlorinator failures were life-threatening situations. While assisting in these emergencies the systems were often ill-prepared in that no Emergency Response Plans were in place. In several cases, the utilities also made many errors which resulted in additional down time and further endangered the public safety.

Good news and bad

In one recent instance a new operator had just assumed employment as water plant operator for a small city when the main well failed. This well was the only city well that was legal to use since nitrate had contaminated two previously used wells. Neither the new operator nor city council members had experience with a crisis of this magnitude. It took two days just to figure out who to call to get the pump in the well replaced. In the meantime, one of the nitrate contaminated wells was operated without disinfection for more than a day. KDHE wasn't informed of operating an out of compliance well without chlorination. Needless to say this system is suffering from these decisions and may be paying penalties.



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The mayor commented to me that this was a learning experience and he was totally unaware of the ramifications of decisions and actions he and the council had made and taken. He lamented that some sort of Emergency Response Plan would have been a good guide to follow and surely would have reduced the difficulty in dealing with the problem. I agreed and explained that an Emergency Response Plan would have listed key personnel and services to contact. Had that been followed, this small town would have suffered no down time and would have sidestepped the many public safety issues they now contend with.

Even though western Kansas has had a mild winter this year, an early December ice storm did damage to the power grid in some

Emergency Response Plan, the proper service providers were contacted. The inconvenience of no pump controls and running a backup well for a few days was all this system suffered. Most of the customers were unaware of any problems as there were no interruptions of service, much less the feared “boil order.”

Where are the parts?

Another example of not being prepared is that too many cities and RWDs do not have an appropriate inventory of replacement parts, especially for critical equipment. This would include chlorinator parts and a backup chlorinator. I have had to retrieve parts from other systems to repair chlorinators more often than any other item. KRWA also maintains backup chlorinators but



Good record keeping can lead to a well stocked and organized parts and supply room that can go a long way to head off a crisis that puts customers at risk. This photo shows some of the inventory bins at Washington RWD 1.

areas. One public water supply well field operated a generator for more than a week to maintain a water supply. However, when the electricity was restored, one phase was not functioning, resulting in damage to one pump and a telemetry control system. Thanks to the water utility having an

they are often in use or in another part of the state. We intend to add to that inventory to better help systems.

I recommend that every water utility maintain a minimum of at least two repair components in inventory for each size pipeline. On one system a contractor had plowed

parallel to a 2-inch main. I helped install 24 gasketed repair couplings. We glued the remaining breaks on this PVC line. The pipeline that was damaged served water to a critical customer and it was essential that person have water. Yes, it may be excessive to maintain 24 repair couplings but accidents on this scale do happen. It is sometimes impossible to be fully prepared.

Where do you begin?

First, consider the possibility of a potential well failure or other system problem seriously. Conduct an assessment of the systems' operations to determine what components are critical. Good record keeping will determine what repairs the system has needed over the past five years. With that history log and information, develop a parts inventory list. Last, make sure the utility has a listing of phone numbers that more than just one person is familiar with in order to be able to contact the necessary services when problems occur. This list should include state regulatory

officials, suppliers and service providers.

Not all emergencies can be prepared for but a city or RWD can at least have a plan of action should

“Confined Space Monitoring for Entry Using 4-Gas Monitors and Well Maintenance that Delivers Extra Years of Service,” are among the 56 outstanding technical

KRWA is pleased to provide assistance to help a city or RWD develop an Emergency Response Plan.

problems occur. KRWA is pleased to provide assistance to help a city or RWD develop an Emergency Response Plan. Give us a call at 785/336-3760 and someone will be in contact.

I would like to encourage you to attend the Annual KRWA Conference & Exhibition in Wichita, March 28 – 30. Several sessions that I recommend adding to your list of “must-dos” include “Chlorine, It’s a Gas! But Let’s Practice Safety First,” on Wednesday, March 29. Also check out “Finding Ways to Come to Agreement,” on Wednesday.

sessions for which the KRWA Annual Conference has become well known.

The EXPO Hall will have more exhibits than ever. All this is for the benefit of systems to learn, shop, compare and to meet people who have common interests. I encourage boards and councils, operators, administrative staff and others to take advantage of everything that the KRWA Annual Conference offers.



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