

Restarting the System  
by  
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Covid 19 has changed the way we do business in this country on a number of levels. Many operators have been told not to go into customer's buildings, and this makes it impossible to replace meters that quit working. Some systems were on week-on and week-off schedules to lessen the possibility that employees were infecting each other or all getting infected at the same time. Municipal offices are often closed or only have limited access. Customers are expected to put their payments in the drop box or payment slot outside. This is a two edged sword, in that the clerk does not have to listen to the sob story about why the customer cannot pay their entire bill, but on the other hand the clerk also cannot personally notify the customer of the consequences of not paying the bill.

Training has been affected by the virus as well. We were very lucky to finish the Annual Conference in March just prior to the nationwide lockdown policies being put in place. All of our training for the last part of March through the middle of June had to be cancelled, and we are now trying to reschedule the missed classes and continue with the scheduled classes for the rest of the year. With the Western Conference having been cancelled due to the difficulty of maintaining social distancing with a large crowd and the inability of vendors to give a definite answer related to their attendance, we are trying to schedule a few more classes in the western part of the state to accommodate operators who need CEUs. If this pandemic had occurred during an odd numbered year, the issues we are all facing would be magnified many times. At least now there is a year left to get your required hours for renewal.

The state has indicated that there will be latitude in the number of hours needed for the renewal of water operator licenses, although wastewater certificate holders may be allowed a couple of months leeway in receiving CEUs, depending on the date of expiration. Webinars and Zoom meetings have been recommended for getting needed training hours, but NeRWA is currently not set up for this type of training. Getting speakers to come to a training session is difficult enough, but trying to coordinate a zoom meeting with 4 or 5 speakers and getting the timeline for them all set up is something we just are not prepared to do at the present time.

We all hope that the virus goes away over the summer and that we can get back to our normal work routines in the fall. We also hope that the virus does not return this winter or that there is a vaccination that will assist in fighting it so that we can begin to treat it like we currently treat the flue. We need to maintain distancing from those who are most vulnerable to the virus and have the greatest chance of a bad outcome while still completing the tasks that need to be completed in our professions. As long as the hosting municipality does not cancel the scheduled classes or the local health department does not prohibit them, our continuing education classes will be held as scheduled.