

Association Update

NeRWA has endured a great deal of change in recent months. Most of you are aware that we lost EPA funding as of May 15th for our Groundwater, Source Water, and Training programs. In this article I have tried to summarize the events and outcomes of the last several months for our members.

It was not possible to maintain the Training Specialist program without the funding from EPA. I regret to inform you that Fred Baumert is no longer working for NeRWA. If you were familiar with Fred, you already know that he was a hardworking and knowledgeable Training Specialist. I wish Fred the very best in the position he accepted with the Department of Health and Human Services. Despite this setback, the Association will provide all of the water operator training classes scheduled for 2007. We have not cancelled a single class due to the loss of our funding. And we will continue to provide just as much water operator training in 2008 through the cooperative efforts of our staff. As many of you may have noticed, our Grades 1 – 4 water operator classes are no longer free. In order to recover some of the travel and administrative costs incurred to hold classes, it is necessary to charge \$35 per person for our regular one-day water operator classes. We hope that you will be understanding about this and realize that the loss of funding has made this change necessary. We are trying to keep the cost as reasonable as possible for the small town operator.

The Groundwater Specialist program has changed a great deal. We have entered into a contract with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to provide assistance to communities that are experiencing significant increases of nitrates in drinking water. Through this program, Charles Bausch, Groundwater Specialist for NeRWA, will work with these communities to develop intensive wellhead protection management plans in an effort to reverse the trend of increasing nitrates. A consequence of this program is that we will no longer be able to assist any community that is interested in developing a wellhead protection plan as we have in the past. We are limited to working with communities concerned about nitrates. Nonetheless, we are glad to be able to offer assistance to those communities.

Although the Source Water program no longer exists, Barney Whatley is still working for NeRWA. Our Association submitted a proposal to the State of Nebraska to provide financial and managerial assistance to water systems. This contract was competitively bid on by two other organizations. NeRWA was selected to fulfill the contract and Barney will work in this capacity as soon as we have a signed contract in hand. His efforts will focus on assisting communities with water rates, financial assessments, and other tools to insure the long-term sustainability of the water system and compliance with drinking water standards.

The chances of regaining EPA funding in the future is still uncertain. I am glad to tell you that Senator Chuck Hagel and Senator Ben Nelson have voiced strong support for re-establishing the rural water programs. This would not only benefit Nebraska, but water systems in all other states as well. Nebraska Rural Water is grateful to Senator Hagel,

Senator Nelson, and their staffs for their efforts to provide programs that benefit communities all across Nebraska.

I hope that this has given you a little clearer picture of our situation. Quite frankly, there is still a certain degree of uncertainty about our long-term stability. Will we grow? Will we stay the same? Will we endure another setback? Personally, I am optimistic that good things are in store for us all. Time will tell.

On a different note, the 3rd Annual NeRWA Utility Expo was recently held at Christensen Field in Fremont. The Expo has increased in attendance each year and we have high hopes that it will become an even bigger and better event for water and wastewater operators. I would like to extend a hearty “Thank You” to every operator, exhibitor, and presenter at this year’s Expo. A special thanks to Sargent Drilling for sponsoring a great lunch. And to Larry Andreason, John Tlamka, and the rest of the Fremont Water Department for working with NeRWA to make the Expo possible. It certainly takes a lot of teamwork to make an event like the Expo successful, and many thanks to everyone involved.

Last but not least, the Fall Conference in Gering, Nebraska is fast approaching, and will be held September 11th and 12th at the Gering Civic Center. I hope that you can make time to attend this event and refresh you memory, learn new things, and see old friends. Thanks for your time.

Clancy Dempsey
Executive Director