

Employee Safety and Training

By Mike Lucas, Wastewater Technician

A couple of weeks ago I received an e-mail from Salli reminding us of the deadline for our next magazine article. At that point I started trying to decide what I could share with all of you that might be worth your time to consider. Then, while I was on the road to another appointment for camera work, I received a phone call that gave me direction and also reinforced the direction that has been taken with NeRWA's wastewater training for this year.

Many of you know that occasionally I do get on my soapbox regarding issues that I feel strongly about. This time it's about the value of employee safety and training.

I am very aware that budgets are tight and every effort is and should be made to maintain reasonable utility rates. We must remember that we are responsible to those ratepayers that own the systems that we operate. I know that you are periodically reminded of that fact. However, safety and training are not the place to make cuts. I submit that training doesn't cost, but, in fact, has a payback. Well-trained employees will save the ratepayers/voters money in the long run.

We occasionally have Board Members and Managers attend our training sessions. I always commend them for their commitment to their employees. These people are responsible to ensure training is available to you as employees.

As an employee we are responsible to our families, those that we work with, and the ratepayers who have invested in us to attend the training and then we need to apply that training in our workplace. It is also incumbent upon us as operators to inform our administration of our safety and training needs.

Certified operators are required to accumulate CEU's to maintain their license. However, I suggest that employees that are not required to be certified often times face the same hazards and have the same needs. They need the same training, too, and at a bare minimum so they will be able to recognize dangerous conditions and situations.

Our first wastewater class for 2013 was held in Wahoo. We discussed VFD's, what they are and costs/benefits involved with them in pumping applications. We discussed potential energy dollar savings in treatment plants and lift stations. Lagoon treatment was considered. Lastly we discussed potential hazardous atmospheres in confined spaces.

The phone call that I referred to earlier was received the day after the Wahoo class. It came from an uncertified operator that had become violently ill after an extended period of time working on wastewater pumps in an enclosed space. I suspect that hydrogen sulfide was the cause. He received medical treatment and at the time of this writing is feeling well. A life may have been needlessly lost in the service to his community. He seriously felt like he was going to die for a couple of days and he expressed to me his concerns for his fellow workers. Think about it!

There are many opportunities for training provided across the state at a very reasonable cost. Please attend those that you can and take a Board Member, manager or office person along. Especially, please consider inviting a non-certified operator from another system to attend with you. You might save a life.

I hope that you all had a great Christmas holiday season and will decide today to be safe in 2013 so that you have the opportunity to enjoy the next holiday season with your loved ones.