Is the Use of Drones in Our Future?

By Mike Stanzel, Circuit Rider

As per our contract with National Rural Water, we are required to attend yearly in-service training every June and this past one was in Tulsa, OK. It is basically like our annual conference with a wide variety of classes on different aspects of water and wastewater minus the vendors.

One particular class I attended really peaked my interest mainly because the idea was brought to my attention a few years ago, but there was not much history and data to prove its usefulness until now. Two Circuit Riders, one from South Carolina and one from New Jersey, put on a fantastic training session on drones and even brought their drones for "Show 'n Tell" so to speak.

The cost of the drones are surprisingly not too bad, but there are some other expenses acquired with the purchase of one, like an upgraded camera, memory cards, protective case, charger, landing pad and iPad. You are also required to obtain a license to fly a remote object. (Can't be any worse than the wastewater test right? LOL)

The big question is how can we use this service to benefit our members? Well, here are some tasks that these states have used their drones for:

USDA projects - to provide updates and high quality photos.

Water tank inspections - checking hatch, vent rust etc.

Tank construction updates

Mapping

Surveying towns after storms or flooding

Checking well sites or wastewater plants if roads are impassable

Search and rescue

Early jobsite planning for wells or mains

Searching for leaks or main breaks in towns or rural areas

These are just a few things that these two states have compiled in the past year.

So what I need to do is provide a bundle of information about drones to our beloved Board members and seek their approval to purchase one. So I am asking all of you what ideas and jobs you may have that would justify using a drone. Please contact me at 402-672-9084 or mike@nerwa.org so I can put together a list and present it to our Board. I really think it could be a useful tool and benefit many water systems.