

Looking Towards Fall

By Pat Petersen, Training Specialist

As we prepare for our annual journey to the fall conference in Gering, the temperature outside right now is 101 degrees. This makes me look forward to the cooler temps and the beautiful landscape of western Nebraska. The dates for this year's Western Conference are September 11-13. Once again it will be held at the Gering Civic Center in Gering, Nebraska.

Tuesday, September 11 will be the "stand alone" pre-conference. The theme of this year's pre-conference will be safety-oriented. Safetyline Consultants will provide safety training for a variety of operator tasks. Safety topics of the pre-conference this year will include: Traffic Control, Equipment Operation, Personal Protective Equipment and a special session entitled "Safety, Whose Fault is it?" More and more operators seem to be taking more responsibilities in their profession and one thing that must remain is a safe workplace and surroundings. This pre-conference should help operators brush up on their safety skills.

The pre-conference will also include a rundown of what is going on with NeWARN and what it really is. Rich Koenig will moderate this final session of the pre-conference. The annual trip to the Riverview Golf course will follow for some golf, drinks and a whole lot of fun!

Wednesday will take off to sounds of shotguns at the morning trap shoot and roaring motorcycles. For those of you interested in participating in the trap shoot be sure to let the office know or Mike Stanzel if you run into him. He will be in charge of the shoot. The annual poker run will take off in front of the Civic Center. Ken Halvorsen, Doug Woodbeck and Jack Satur will help get you lined up with a route planned for a fantastic ride through the western hills. Hopefully they make it back for the Regulatory Update presented by Andy Kahle. Other presentations on Monday will include Operator Certification Programs on both the water and wastewater side and a USDA/Rural Development Update. Wednesday will finish with a banquet and an awards presentation.

Thursday will kick off with the annual operator breakfast followed by six hours of learning and fun. Some presentations on Thursday will include contamination issues, field rep and lab Q and A, and at least 5 hours of backflow. The agenda continues to be a work in progress and hopefully will not disappoint when it is finalized. We continue to look for new ideas and presentations but also want to keep the relaxed feel that the Western Conference offers. See you in Gering!

On a more personal note, as I write this article, I am currently finishing up the one day training class in Valentine, Nebraska. Yesterday we spent the day in Chadron for five hours of continuing education, but like today, someone was missing. I have been the training specialist for 5 ½ years and each year I make a trip to the western half of Nebraska to offer the hours needed for recertification. This was the first year that Capacity Development Director Scott Sprague was not a part of the program, or what we used to call the "West Coast Tour." If I had to guess, almost every water operator in Nebraska probably sat through one of Scott's presentations because of how dedicated he was to providing training to everyone in the State of Nebraska. Scott passed away and will be missed terribly, especially in the world of training. Thank you for everything you helped me with Scott, and may you rest well.....