UTILITIES HELPING UTILITIES
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I recently had the privilege of attending an AWWA workshop in Denver, Co. pertaining to utilities helping utilities. Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN). The objective is to organize all water/wastewater utilities within each State to help each other with personnel and resources in times of need, be it a natural disaster, or human caused disaster. A WARN is not a corporation or a governmental unit, simply utilities organized by agreement to help each other when the need arises.

As those who were involved in the ice storm recently, the question isn't if a disaster is going to happen, but rather when is a disaster is going to happen. And when it does, utilities need all of the help they can get. Utility operations are specialized. Often, a neighboring water or wastewater operator can be much more help than an emergency responder with no operator experience.

The State of Nebraska was well represented at the meeting. HHSS, The League of Municipalities, AWWA, NeRWA, and large and small water and wastewater systems were all represented. It was pretty welled agreed upon that mutual aid is something that is currently happening around the State, but it is not real well organized when it comes to water and wastewater systems. I know of several systems that share or trade parts and equipment, but what is lacking is a written agreement that spells out the responsibilities of all parties involved. This can reduce administrative conflicts. A signed agreement is in already in place prior to a disaster occurring. This can ease the mind of decision makers when it comes to workman's comp issues, equipment damage, etc.

The delegation attending the workshop from Nebraska decided that is was worthwhile to meet again as a group and set up and initial leadership team. The next step after that will probably be to set up a kick –off session and see how much interest is out there. I encourage everyone to be watching for this. There are times when we each need all of the help we can get.