

Update
Randy Hellbusch

The majority of NeRWA staff has just returned from National Rural Water Associations Technical Conference in Dallas TX. All of our field staff is required to attend two events such as this annually. There are many sessions at these events that cover a wide variety of topics related to water and wastewater. As with any such conference, some of the sessions are more enlightening than others. One of the most enjoyable aspects of these conferences for me is the chance to visit with peers from all parts of the country.

The thing that has always interested me is how much things are the same across the United States when it comes to small water systems. Circuit Riders, whether they are from North Dakota, New Jersey, Texas, or wherever share pretty much the same experiences we do here in Nebraska. Leak Detection, Coliform hits, Water Rates, Chlorination, and Regulations all seem to be the main topics small water systems are asking for help with throughout the U.S.

There were a couple of sessions on revenues and rates for small water systems that were interesting for me. Once again, things are pretty much the same across the country. Water rates are a major issue and one that many decision makers don't like to tackle.

Regulations are always a big part any conference such as this. Not always a real exiting topic, but very necessary just the same. A couple of upcoming regulations that many systems in Nebraska are going to be effected by are the Groundwater rule and the Distribution rule.

E.P.A. may come out with their final version of the Groundwater rule as early as next month. The rule was proposed 2 years ago, but was rejected by the office of Management & Budget as being too costly. It is unknown at this time what modifications E.P.A. has made to the rule to make it more affordable. As many of you know, the original name of the rule was the Groundwater Disinfections rule. It will be interesting to see how the final rule looks. All I can say at this time is stay tuned.

The Distribution rule is probably 4 to 5 years away. E.P.A. has regulated water sources for everything possible, and their only other logical step is to start regulating the distribution system. Sounds something to me like job security! One aspect of the rule is going to be water accountability. E.P.A. says that if your system isn't tight there are increased risks of pulling in contaminants during times of low pressures or high flows. **Unmetered systems beware!** As I said, the rule is a few years away, but it looks like systems may be required to account for 85% or more of the water pumped. I have no idea how to accomplish this with an **unmetered** system. Cross-Connection will be another huge component of the distribution rule. I feel we have a very effective cross-connection program in Nebraska. Is it good enough for E.P.A.? We will have to wait and see. One thing we were told is that E.P.A. has backed off on residential services at this time and is only looking at cross-connection requirements for commercial and industrial accounts. Heterotrophic Plate Counts (HPC) will also likely be a part of the

distribution rule. HPC's are somewhat like a coliform test, only they count all bacteria. For instance, a HPC count of 500 or more in the distribution system may trigger flushing, chlorination etc. until the count is lowered. Record keeping of such things as age of pipe, Valve exercising, hydrant flushing, etc. also may be a part of the rule.

One positive aspect of the Distribution rule, is that it maybe an excellent opportunity to revisit the Total Coliform Rule. There is a possibility that only a Fecal or E-coli positive sample would be a violation. A total coliform positive sample that is negative for Fecal or E-coli would possible trigger flushing, chlorination, etc. but would not result in a violation. I feel this would be a huge step in not only greatly reducing the number of violations, but also help instill public confidence in small public drinking water systems.