

Nebraska News

Changes Coming to the Nebraska Water Industry Workforce

by Marc Rosso/Tetra Tech, Inc. and Michael Wentink/Nebraska DHHS DPH

Based on information from recent national surveys, much of the institutional knowledge in the water industry could disappear as aging workers retire. The Nebraska Section of the American Water Works Association (NS-AWWA) took a proactive approach to the potential workforce retention issue by conducting a survey to determine what resources the Section should devote to attracting and maintaining membership.

In addition to identifying what the Nebraska Section could do to attract non-members, the research project also sought to obtain reliable demographic information to help forecast the impact of Baby Boomer retirements on public water systems in Nebraska. Developmental work on this project began in 2008 with the assignment of an ad hoc committee. The ad hoc committee members are:

- Lee Applebee, Lincoln Water System
- Brian Gongol, DJ Gongol & Associates, Inc.
- Mary Poe, Nebraska DHHS DPH

- Marc Rosso, HDR, Inc. (currently of Tetra Tech, Inc.)
- Richard Sklenar, Papio-Missouri NRD
- Michael Wentink, Nebraska DHHS DPH

The project was jointly sponsored by the Nebraska Section AWWA, the Nebraska Water Environment Association, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health. Wiese Research Associates, Inc., was selected as a consultant and worked under contract with the ad hoc committee to develop a survey that was designed to be mailed to existing members as well as to potential members who are Nebraska-licensed water operators and/or certified wastewater operators.

There were three target group mailing lists:

- 374 current members of the Nebraska Section AWWA
- 1,548 potential members who hold credentials as water operators (including some who hold both water and wastewater credentials)
- 590 potential members who hold only wastewater credentials

CREDENTIALS AND WORK SECTORS OF THOSE RESPONDING

	Total Survey (n=698)		AWWA Members Only (n=173)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Credential (License, Registration)				
Licensed Water Operator (Grade I-IV)	524	76%	92	54%
Licensed Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester (Grade VI)	113	16%	30	18%
Certified Wastewater Operator	238	34%	30	18%
Professional Engineer	65	9%	56	33%
Other	41	6%	26	15%
Do not hold a credential	24	3%	21	12%
Total¹		144%		150%

Primary Work in Water Industry

Public water systems operations	480	69%	83	48%
Consulting firm	42	6%	34	20%
Manufacturer rep/sales	13	2%	11	6%
Regulatory	33	5%	16	9%
Education (college, technical school, university)	9	1%	6	3%
Technical assistance organization	9	1%	2	1%
Fully retired	14	2%	8	5%
Wastewater	38	6%	2	1%
Other	56	8%	11	7%
Total		100%		100%

WHO RETURNED THE SURVEYS?

Target Group	Number Mailed	Number Returned	Rate Of Return
Group 1 (AWWA list)	374	173	46%
Group 2 (W & WW list)	1,548	417	27%
Group 3 (WW-only list)	590	108	18%
Total	2,512	698	28%

HOW OLD WERE THE RESPONDENTS?

Age	Total Survey (n=698)		AWWA Members Only (n=173)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 25	3	--	1	--
25 to 34	45	7%	14	9%
35 to 49	199	31%	45	30%
50 to 54	131	21%	26	17%
55 to 59	113	18%	18	12%
60 to 64	89	14%	28	19%
65/Over	58	9%	19	13%
Total		100%		100%
Average (Median) Age	51.9 years		52.2 years	

A total of 2,512 surveys were mailed in summer 2009, and the findings were compiled in late 2009. A total of 698 surveys were returned to the contractor for tabulation, for an overall response rate of 28 percent, within the expected range of typical mail surveys conducted with a single mailing. This overall return rate was considered acceptable for the Section's use.

In future issues, we will address other results of the survey. In this first installment, we wanted to share with you the overall sample characteristics and NS-AWWA membership demographics. The tables accompanying this report tell the story in full detail, but three highlights stand out:

- The largest numbers of total respondents work in water systems operations
- Almost 4 in 10 respondents could retire in the next 10 years
- Respondents overwhelmingly prefer one-day seminars to other training events

As you review the details in this and future installments, we invite you to share your comments with the members of the committee and your Section leadership, as we all seek to do the right things for our industry and the Nebraska communities we serve.

POPULATIONS SERVED BY RESPONDENTS

	Total Survey (n=698)		AWWA Members Only (n=173)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Public Water System Population				
Less than 1,000	235	35%	11	7%
1,000 to 3,299	77	12%	17	11%
3,300 to 9,999	78	12%	19	12%
10,000 to 50,000	77	12%	15	10%
Greater than 50,000	75	11%	33	21%
Not affiliated with public water system	120	18%	60	39%
Total²		100%		100%

WHICH NS-AWWA ACTIVITIES RESPONDENTS DESCRIBED AS "IMPORTANT"

	Total Sample (n=649)	AWWA Members (n=160)
One-day seminars	70%	55%
Annual joint fall conference	47%	68%
Email regulatory alerts/updates	33%	51%
AWWA association news	33%	42%
Information on NS-AWWA website	20%	29%

WHICH NS-AWWA ACTIVITIES RESPONDENTS WANT TO SEE PROVIDED MORE

	Total Sample (n=616)	AWWA Members (n=155)
One-day seminars	66%	56%
Support materials for public information	39%	40%
Email regulatory alerts/updates	19%	17%
Research information	19%	21%
AWWA association news	13%	8%
Information on NS-AWWA website	9%	10%

WHICH TOPICS RESPONDENTS WANT NS-AWWA TO EMPHASIZE MORE AT EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

	Licensed Water Or Certified Wastewater (n=565)	Total Sample (n=639)	AWWA Members (n=158)
Water system operation and maintenance	83%	77%	59%
Public water systems management	39%	38%	41%
Public water systems regulatory specifics	35%	34%	30%
Design and construction case studies	27%	31%	51%
Public water system security	24%	23%	18%
Research projects	21%	22%	25%

(Footnotes)

¹Includes multiple replies from some respondents

²Includes multiple replies from some respondents

WELCOME OUR NEW SECTION MEMBERS

Ronald Bishop, Diamond Plastics Corp.
 Chris Christenson, Johnson Controls
 Jake Fisher, Lincoln, NE
 Laura Hardesty, The Cadmus Group, Inc.
 Luke Kleen, Ruskin, NE
 Leah Kottwitz, Omaha, NE
 David Marszalec, Emerson
 Darren Marten, Broken Bow Municipal Utility
 Amin Mohebbi, Omaha, NE
 Mike Ruzicka, City of Ravenna
 Robert Thompson, Lexington Utilities System

