

KRWA Developing New Apprenticeship Program

Did you know that it takes more than 4,000 highly skilled water and wastewater personnel to ensure the public supply of safe drinking water in Kansas and to protect Kansas' lakes, streams, and groundwater? Water professionals are responsible for meeting stringent regulatory standards, replacing aging infrastructure, recruiting and training new operators, and responding to and recovering from disasters. Those working in the water and wastewater industry have seen many advancements in water treatment and supply technologies which has led to an increase in the level of skill and training required of this workforce.

In addition to increasing professional demands, many water and wastewater utilities will be losing many of their most experienced employees. Over the

next ten years, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of their workforce to retirement. Many of these employees have worked for the same utility for the majority of their career and will take decades of valuable information with them when they retire.

While small utilities are faced with losing a significant number of employees to retirement, they also struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff. There has been a nationwide decline in technical education and small communities cannot offer the same wages as large systems.

With all of these challenges facing the water and wastewater workforce, KRWA has initiated steps to develop a nationally registered apprenticeship program aimed at recruiting and training the next generation of operators.

What is an apprenticeship program?

An apprenticeship is a system of training a new generation of workforce with on-the-job training where the apprentice can earn and learn at the same time. The KRWA Apprenticeship program will consist of a two year time-based program in which the apprentice will complete 4,000 hours of on-the-job training combined with related theoretical instruction (course work) of approximately 144 hours per year. There will be specific minimum qualifications for entry into the program. The apprentice will earn incremental wage increases as skills are gained. Every graduate of a registered apprenticeship program will receive a completion certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, which is a nationally-recognized credential.

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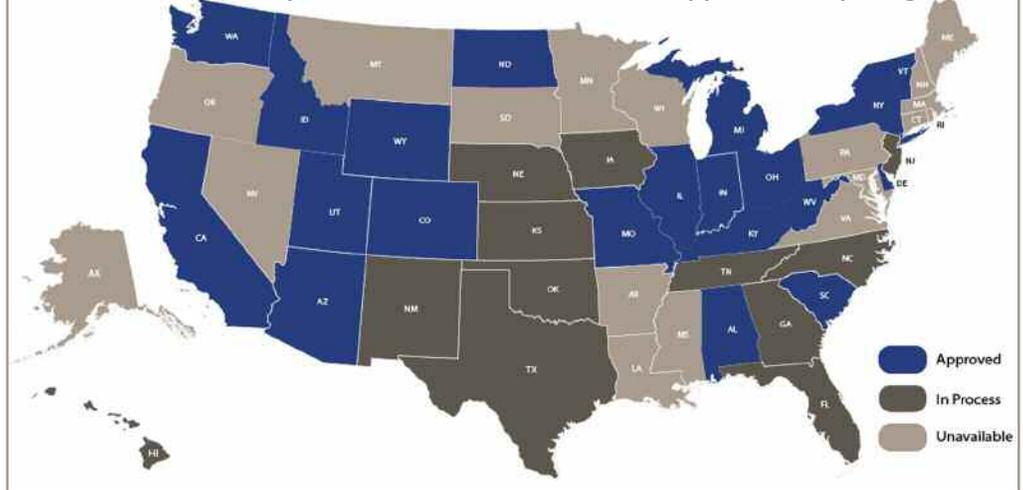
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KRWA is currently in the very early stages of developing an apprenticeship program. Many other states in the U.S. have launched their own apprenticeship program and the very first graduate of the apprenticeship program, Nick Hines from the state of Indiana, received his completion certificate at the NRWA WaterPro conference in Nashville this September. In order for KRWA to get the ball rolling, we will be sending out a survey to water and wastewater systems in Kansas to get some information regarding workforce numbers, operator training, and operator wages. This information is very important for the association to develop an apprenticeship program. Next, KRWA will be forming a small development committee which will be responsible for creating KRWA's Standards of Apprenticeship. We are looking for water/wastewater professionals who are passionate about recruiting and training the next generation of operators. If you are

Status of Development of National Rural Water Apprenticeship Program



interested in joining the apprenticeship development committee or if your utility would be interested in hiring an apprentice, please contact Monica Wurtz at monica@krwa.net or (785) 262-7301.

Pre-Apprenticeship

Another new initiative that KRWA will be taking on is youth outreach (or pre-apprenticeship). How does a young person decide what career path they want to take if they have never been exposed to it? KRWA wants to get the message out to our youth of what our industry does and how they

can be a part of it. KRWA is planning to create an outreach program with Kansas high schools, career fairs, etc. to promote careers in the water and wastewater industry. Watch for updates at www.krwa.net.

Monica Wurtz began work with KRWA in October 2013. She previously worked at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and also worked at US EPA Region 7 for four years. Monica is considered a national expert on various drinking water regulations.



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