



Deciding What's Important During the COVID-19 Pandemic

If anything, good has come out of this whole COVID-19 pandemic, it's that many people, including myself, have been presented with the opportunity to re-evaluate what's important to them. The pandemic has certainly changed the way we see the world – and how to work in that world.

Because of someone I was near who tested positive, everyone in the house had to quarantine. After a week another person in the house tested positive so that extended the quarantine even further. I can attest that experiencing 28 days quarantined is not the most pleasant experience. Especially if you are a person who is accustomed to being outside and working with people, it's probably hard to imagine how pent up a person can become.

Many cities and water districts are still not allowing full access to their offices. Meetings have been held “virtually”. Here at the city of Sabetha we have changed the way we are conducting the Commission meetings or any meeting for that matter.

As for the better, the pandemic seems to have made us more appreciative of what we have – and what we really do not need. I do think the pandemic has helped many people appreciate what they have, such as spending more time with their families.

In our city, workers continued as usual, with caution to social distance. We have been fortunate to not have any city workers testing positive.

As for the Kansas Rural Water Association, the staff have continued just as always by taking care to social distance. Extra precautions have been practiced to social distance when providing technical assistance.

Online Training – and a cancelled 2021 KRWA conference

During the COVID-19 era so far, we all have had to adjust to the changes caused by the pandemic. One area of particular concern to operators in the water and wastewater field is obtaining the required hours for a water or

wastewater license. Holding licenses in both water since 1988 and wastewater since 1992, there has never been a problem acquiring the necessary or required hours of training to maintain the certifications. The KRWA conference was always a great event to not only pick up the required hours to maintain the licenses by attending all the great sessions as well. It was also an event that allowed operators to converse with other operators to learn about each other's systems. The exhibits were unparalleled as a place to learn about new products and services. As you read in this issue in the article by Elmer, the KRWA board has cancelled the 2021 conference and exhibition out of the concern for the health and safety of all of those who might attend. They are the “essential workers” in most communities.

The pandemic has forced operators to search where they can go for the training hours required to maintain their operator certifications. In-person training sessions by KRWA have continued after June 1 with social distancing. KRWA makes masks available at each session. KRWA was first to provide online training under a pilot program allowed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). Numerous online training sessions have been held and more are planned. KRWA hopes that online training will continue to be allowed in the future. Take a look at the numerous notes of appreciation that are printed in the “letters” section of this issue to see how well the online training has been embraced.

National Rural Water Conference went “virtual”

For the last five years I have served as the delegate from the Kansas Rural Water Association on the Board of Directors on the National Rural Water Association. I bring this up because, due to the pandemic, the Water-Pro Conference that is NRWA's yearly conference was cancelled this year as well. A meeting of the board of directors is always held in conjunction with the conference. The NRWA

Board meeting was instead moved to Nashville with the option for the directors to either attend in person or virtually. Instead of going to Nashville in person I went for the second option to attend virtually. NRWA used the GoToWebinar portal. Since the first time being involved in a meeting virtually, it was amazing how easy it was. NRWA provided an ID number specifically for myself and I signed on, entered the required data and was involved in the voting virtually. It was so smooth! I have hope that KDHE will allow Kansas Rural Water and other training providers the ability to provide regular training sessions in this manner.

So, what else has been learned? Here are my thoughts.

1. It is possible to work remotely. The internet is not a luxury. Thanks to the internet, I was able to accomplish many work-related tasks from home. Major corporations actually want some employees to work remotely. Technology has made that possible. Many KRWA staff have always been in that situation for years. Accountability is a concern but you either trust people or you don't.
2. As previously mentioned, virtual training, or online training, has been a goal by KRWA for many years. KDHE however would not approve it. Due to the inability of holding in-person training to the extent required for operators to obtain the necessary credit hours, there's little choice but to allow for online training. KRWA studied various portals and decided on "GoToWebinar". The portal does a great job of tracking the attendees and provides a report when anyone is inattentive to the training. On November 17, KRWA will provide the first "simulcast" training session with

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presentations by Tyler Engebretson and Eric Mixon representing Pumps of Oklahoma and Jeff Flathman, President of Energy Solutions Professionals.

3. We need to care for each other. Being quarantined for a month takes a toll on a person's psyche. It's hard to imagine the families that lost a loved one through this time and could not even have a proper funeral service. If you know of someone who has experienced that, reach out to them. It doesn't take much personal bandwidth to make a phone call or send an e-mail of support. In doing so, you will be helping someone else cope with a situation that's already been exasperated due to the pandemic.

Bill Shroyer is Assistant City Administrator at the City of Sabetha. Bill worked for KRWA from 1994 to 1999 as KRWA's first Wastewater Circuit Rider. He was elected to KRWA's Board of Directors in 2014 and to the National Rural Water Association Board of Directors in 2016. He holds Class III water operator certification and Class IV wastewater operator certification in Kansas.



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