

Kansas mutual aid and emergency response = teamwork

No sooner had the November issue of the KRWA magazine, *The Kansas Lifeline*, been published, containing articles on disaster recovery, Mother Nature was again about to whop many utility systems with another test. Electric, water and wastewater utility systems in Kansas have been hit hard by just about all Mother Nature has to offer in 2007. As with prior emergencies or disasters, Kansans stepped up to help their neighboring systems. At KRWA's office, training sessions for 2008 were being developed and the finishing details were being placed on the 2008 Conference. Instead of fretting about Christmas shopping and other holiday plans,



*Jim Jackson
Training Director*

the weather dominated the attention and discussion. When the ice began forming on the evening of December 10, KRWA had a change of plans requiring rescheduling of training sessions – but work on the final details for the 2008 conference continued. That is, until the phone lines went dead and the power went out. Running the KRWA office on three or four cell phones was not the most efficient but it was the only way to communicate as land lines were out of service. Broad areas of rural Kansas were without power for up to several weeks. Having no power when our

homes, churches, schools, community centers, water and wastewater utilities are absolutely dependent on power cannot be appreciated until that situation presents itself. And even though

Neighbors helping neighbors

KRWA began receiving calls for help on Monday, December 10 – and the calls just kept coming for days and days. “We need a generator!” was the typical request.

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many residents in cities and RWDs were without power, with few exceptions the water and wastewater services were ongoing. To accomplish that required some

KRWA staff networked with the local county emergency folks, who in many cases were overwhelmed because of the size of the storm, and with the Kansas Department of



Paul Strathman, Manager of Rural Water District No. 3, Nemaha County (left) is pictured with Marshal Goodnight and Clarence Brunk of the City of De Soto Water Department after the delivery of two large generators during the December 2007 ice storm. The generators are owned by De Soto and the city of Eudora.

extraordinary efforts by many operators, managers and others – under conditions that at times made it was impossible to even stand up.

Emergency Management. Networking with equipment rental agencies and providers was crucial to getting necessary equipment to systems in short time.

Generators were next to impossible to locate initially. Many water systems did not have an accurate estimate of their power needs to size a generator. As generators were located KRWA staff helped communities make many new friends among these utilities. For example, a generator came from Nebraska through a Missouri company that KRWA had been in contact with. We routed it to Nemaha County. With a trailer load of industrial generators, the company stopped where needed as directed to deliver the equipment. Neighboring rural water districts in Nemaha County shared a couple of generators that were delivered to the KRWA office by the city of De Soto. Talk about city/RWD cooperation! The city of Yates Center delivered a generator to Jackson RWD 3 at Holton north of Topeka. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment also made sure that additional sample bottles were provided to those systems that had lost pressure due to storm-related damage. Neighboring systems sharing with each other, cities delivering their generators to people they had never before met, generator rental companies asking which communities were most in need and rental companies trying to coordinate reassignment of equipment to those utilities still in need – it was a hectic and beneficial effort.

Coordination and teamwork

The theme of the 2008 KRWA Conference is “There is no “I” in Teamwork.” This really reflects the attitude of many utility systems, organizations and agencies in Kansas. During the disasters in Kansas in late 2006 and 2007, cities and rural water districts, electric utilities, organizations and agencies have relied on the “neighbor helping neighbor” approach to ensure that



Kansas agencies and organizations have been collaborating to develop the Kansas Mutual Aid Program. Pictured here during a final review of documents on Tuesday, January 22 are: Sylvan Coles, Kansas Water Environment Federation; Jim Jackson, Kansas Rural Water Association; Lanny Uden, Kansas Section American Water Works Association (AWWA); Leo Haynos, Kansas Corporation Commission; Brad Mears, Kansas Municipal Utilities; Dave Waldo, KDHE; Tom Schrempp, Kansas AWWA; Keri Breon, Kansas AWWA. Members not pictured are Colin Hansen, Kansas Municipal Utilities; Mike Tate, KDHE; Dan Hay, Kansas Dept. of Emergency Management and Elmer Ronnebaum, KRWA. (Photo taken by Elmer Ronnebaum)

damaged utilities could recover as soon as possible. From the blizzard in western Kansas early in the year to the devastating tornado in Greensburg in May, the severe flooding in southeastern

Kansas in July, and then the ice storms in December – utility systems, organizations and state agencies responded. Could it have been better in cases? Yes, and it’s now time to prepare.

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Mutual aid plan develops

Public utilities in Kansas need to be prepared. This means that local governing bodies need to take seriously their responsibilities to ensure that essential utilities are maintained or restored as soon as possible during times of disasters or emergencies. To that extent, the Kansas Rural Water Association, Kansas Municipal Utility, Kansas Section American Water Works Association, Kansas Water Environment Association, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Corporation Commission and Kansas Department of Emergency Management have collaborated to create a statewide mutual aid and emergency response network.

The goal of this team effort is to provide procedures so that all utilities are as prepared as possible to request assistance in times of emergencies or disasters and to allow other participating systems the opportunity to respond to neighbors in need in

their recovery efforts. Yes, more “teamwork” will be required to make the Kansas statewide mutual aid/emergency response network become a success.

To learn more about the Kansas mutual aid/emergency

response program, plan to attend the KRWA Conference on Wednesday afternoon, 3/26, in Room 210C at 2:45 pm. Kansas Municipal Utilities Government Relations Director Brad Mears will present “Mutual Aid: Help is on the Way.” Brad has been a leader in the development of the Kansas mutual aid program. His session will explain how a utility can and should be involved. Another session, at 4 p.m. has Clay Center Board of Public Utilities Manager Bill Callaway presenting, “Dealing With Disaster: What Worked and Didn’t in Greensburg.” Bill was a real leader during the restoration of utility services at Greensburg; he will explain how important communication and coordination between agencies and utilities are from the start. Make sure someone from your city or RWD attends these sessions.

KRWA setting up portable water quality testing/training lab

A portable water quality testing and training lab is being set up by KRWA. A variety of water and wastewater testing equipment will be housed in the new 18-foot, tandem axle trailer. From jar testing to DO concentrates for wastewater, the new lab is intended to serve as a training venue. It will also be arranged to connect to a system’s water supply to feed directly through analyzers in the lab. The portable lab should be a great on-site training and technical assistance opportunity for water systems, large and small. The plan is to have the trailer on display at the KRWA conference March 25 - 27. Watch for it in EXPO Hall!

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