

## NYRWA Regional Meeting

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Reflecting back to September 16, 2004, when our NYRWA Board of Directors adopted the Strategic Plan Update developed and submitted by our volunteer members of the Long Range Planning Committee, it is good to report we are now beginning to implement some of the goals set forth by this plan.

Our Ground Water Specialist Steve Winkley, proposed to our Board of Directors that we develop a series of Regional Membership Meetings across the state to address many of the challenges pointed out by the committee members. As we proceeded with developing these meetings, it was realized the complexity of the task and so the Board of Directors recommended we proceed with one meeting, as a pilot project and go from there.

On September 13, 2005, the NYRWA held it's first Regional Membership Meeting in Brewerton, NY. Over 80 were in attendance and the evaluations from the session were very positive. NYRWA members from the central region were invited, including the following counties: Onondaga, Cayuga, Tompkins, Tioga, Cortland, Broome, Chenango, Oswego and Madison.

Regional representation of regulatory agencies present included Sandra Lizlovs and Steve Eidt from NYSDEC Region 7; Erin Spier, Gregor Smith, and John Strepolis from the Central Region Office of the NYSDOH.

The day began with presentations from the NYRWA Staff discussing their perspective programs, followed by outlines from the regulatory agencies on the most critical technical issues facing water and wastewater systems in the region. New regulations were discussed and both agencies covered their operator certification requirements.

Our staff asked those in attendance for direction with future training events, including topics of interest, location and the challenges our operators are facing. Two major issues came out of this discussion.

The first issue brought to our attention was that the operators are not receiving the training announcements we are sending through the mail. We explained that their membership application requires that they list one representative of their system to receive all member mailings. Those in attendance responded, that the individual receiving the announcements was not passing along the information on these training opportunities. It was suggested that they ask that the name of the representative be changed. If this cannot be accomplished, then they, the certified

operator of the member system, could consider joining as an individual member for \$30.00 a year, which will provide them with all member mailings to their home address. This would include our monthly newsletters, our quarterly magazine, our yearly membership directory and all statewide training announcements throughout the year.

It should also be noted that whether a member of Rural Water or not, if you are a certified operator in New York State and registered with the regulatory agencies, you will receive at your home address all training announcements when the training session covers your county. NYRWA is here to train all certified operators, whether a member of this organization or not. If you are not receiving training announcements through the mail at your home address when our training is in your area, then call our toll free number at 1-888-697-8725 and speak with Cheryl to clear up this matter. It is only through these efforts that we can provide you with the necessary material to stay in compliance.

The second critical issue brought out at this meeting was the lack of interest with our youth in considering the water and wastewater industry as a career opportunity for their future. A full-blown discussion took place on the concerns of the aging operator preparing for retirement and our elected officials lack of knowledge on the challenges ahead to fill these important positions. Some consider this a crisis situation and it is in the best interest of our elected officials and our communities to take a proactive approach to this situation.

We, at the NYRWA, will be working on some presentations to educate elected officials of the approaching situation and we wish to assist our member systems in conveying this message. Our field staff can attend your Board Meetings and help to communicate this concern and what can be done to prepare for our future.

We will also work to develop a presentation and brochure to distribute at high school guidance offices, job fairs, and career days. We will all need to work together to raise the professionalism of this industry, educate the public, elected officials and our youth. Together, we can make a difference.

So as we move forward with our Regional Meetings, we will take the suggestions from the attendees at the first meeting and make adjustments to improve our message and this event. We do hope all enjoyed the clambake/luncheon what a wonderful day!!

On behalf of the NYRWA Board of Directors and Staff, we thank all that participated and look forward to the next meeting. Watch your mail for a regional meeting coming to your area and plan to participate. ♠