

“ Are we there Yet “

By Mike Dill

Usually the little one in the back seat will ask this question even before the trip is half done. Like any trip you must have a destination and a reason to go there. Good planning and preparation make the trip much easier. Travel arrangements and a place to stay while away. Pack what's necessary, don't take too many items. However, you must be prepared for whatever. So think about what you need and how you can prepare for this trip. First part of the trip is to have a destination and a reason for going. Where are we going and why? Our destination is certification, and the why, is being prepared to do the job.

Ok, what do we need to start planning? That can be answered with a question. What's required? First, a combination of three years education and on-site, or in - plant experience. If you want to become certified, then you are probably already working at a plant, so on-site experience will come with time. The education part can be a little more difficult. The longer you are out of school, the harder it is to do the bookwork. The book learning is needed as much as the hands-on. The hard part is figuring out how, and with what. Correspondence courses are the easiest. You order some books, do some reading, and take some tests.

Now that we have entered the computer age, more and more training is becoming available on-line. However you do it, you must do the bookwork. Chemistry, Biology, Math, Hydraulics and Electricity are some of the topics you will need to have knowledge of. Depending upon water or waste certification, DOH and/or DEC have requirements that must be met to sit for the certification exam, but that happens later. Don't get ahead of the basic requirements.

We have talked about hard, how about less hard. Get a mentor, someone who is already certified and has the bookwork and experience. If you are working at a plant that has a certified operator, well there's your mentor. Usually people who have put in their time are willing to get you started and offer help along the way. There is no better teacher than experience, so tap the resources.

Operators at other plants can be mentors. New York Rural Water can be mentors. Everyday we offer technical assistance and training to those who want it.

Now we have reached the part about travel. Attend training whenever possible. One reason is networking. That involves talking to your neighbors. At a training session, everyone is there to gain education. Talking to your fellow operators about problems or just chewin' the rag can be educating. Problem solving or advancing the cause of goodwill. More is learned in casual conversation, rather than formal training. How much education do you need? Well in this business, we never stop learning. So, to answer the question, "are we there yet", the answer would be no, because its continuing education, and the trip never ends.