

No Respect

Keith J. Herbert
NYRWA Training Specialist



As a Training Specialist, I have the good fortune of traveling across this state of ours and meeting a lot of water system operators, the men and women that are responsible for the safe production and delivery of drinking water in New York State. I find that many of them are grappling with similar problems related to compliance, funding, and a whole host of other issues which challenge our trade, but one thing that I notice is that many system operators are experiencing a lack of respect from either their controlling boards or the communities that they serve.

The late Rodney Dangerfield's trademark line was "I don't get no respect", then after a brief explanation from Rodney you would easily understand why he got no respect. Water system operators as a whole, are quite a different story, the rural system operator is not simply a laborer who reads gauges and writes down numbers. Very often these operators are required (by the very demands of the job) to be a chemist, lab technician, secretary, security guard, plumber, hydraulics expert, electrician, meter reader/serviceman, cartographer (map maker), maintenance man, heavy equipment operator, public relations person and even a design engineer on occasion.

System size doesn't seem to play a role in the demands of the operation either. I was recently on site at a reasonably small water system, that would rival many large city systems in its complexity of treatment, storage and distribution; and right there keeping everything flowing smoothly, was a faithful operator almost completely unnoticed.

It doesn't take much time speaking with an operator to see that they share a very serious commitment to their profession. Many will tell you of sleepless nights wondering if the storm waters will tear out that old main under the bridge, or how they wait for a phone call whenever the fire whistle blows, because the old mains downtown can't handle a water hammer and break again and again. They will tell you of the stress they feel in late August after a dry summer because they can now see their intake screens..... just hoping that they can make it through to recharge. They carry cell phones and pagers (on and off the job), making themselves available at every hour of every day. They are morally, ethically, and legally responsible 24/7 - 365 days a year for the health of a vast amount of the population from the newborn, to the very elderly. They are the first people sought out by engineering firms working on a system expansion or upgrade, (why?) because they carry the knowledge and operational

understanding of the system better than anyone else.

It seems an injustice that these men and women are not receiving the recognition that they have truly earned. I don't believe that the population at large, or even our board members should necessarily be accused of "disrespect", but I sooner believe that they simply do not realize the incredible amount of work that goes into delivering a gallon of water to a consumer's home. Having said that, I would say to the operator, invite your Board, as well as, interested consumers (keeping security in mind), to a tour of (their/your) system from raw water through treatment, storage and distribution all the way through the meters into their homes and let them see for themselves the responsibility that you shoulder daily. I believe that this couple of hours investment of your time will pay off for many years to come. ♪

Welcome New Members

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Gambro Corp.

Green Acres Campsite

Kellner LLC

Luther Forest Technology Campus

NYC-DEP-Bureau of Water Supply

R.M. Lill, Inc.

Renaissance Project, Inc.

Town of Rutland

Snug Harbor Seasonal Trailer Park

Warwick, Village of

Weston & Sampson Engineers, Inc.