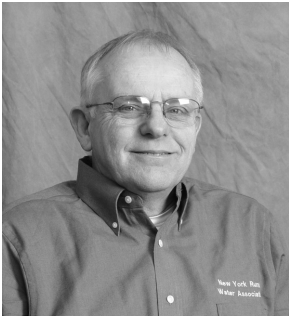


First Time . . . Ever

By Mike Dill
Wastewater Trainer



This past September, Rural Water was pleased to participate in the first ever Panel Discussion for Elected Officials. Many talented people were involved in the planning and implementation of this event, and my thanks go out to them. If you are not aware of this event, let me highlight it for you.

An area was selected, and invitations were sent to all communities in the area, asking that they send at least one elected official to represent their wastewater system. That's right, the spotlight was on wastewater. Presentations were given on wastewater 101, proper management and finance, energy conservation and the various funding options available to communities. The presenters gave a brief slide show followed by questions and answers. At the end of the evening there was an open discussion about plant operations and management. Needless to say, the officials wanted to talk to the funding people. Another benefit of the event was to introduce the elected officials to the technical assistance providers that are here in New York. I think we, meaning assistance providers, are not well known, or the officials are not aware of the help that is available to a community. As I travel about the state and meet with mayors or board members and advise them, I frequently hear "I didn't know there was assistance like that available to us." Whether it is operations, finance, getting through the paperwork to apply for funding, there are people out there that help. It is simple to get the help, if you know it is available. In my time in New York, I have met most of these people or I know their organizations and what they do. We refer communities to these organizations frequently. I am one to say, "I don't know, but I know someone who does." That is what technical assistance is, providing a correct answer or someone who can answer. The simple solution to problem solving.

Back to the event, as a presenter, my job was to talk about wastewater 101, or the basics, trying not to get too technical. Technical is why we have plant operators. Also I tried to stress the importance of communication both ways, between board and operator. Mr. Operator, when was the last time you attended a board meeting or invited the board to your plant for a tour. Mr. Board person, when was the last time you invited your operator to a board meeting or visited the plant for a tour, or just drop by to ask, "How's things going." Remember both ways applies. I told the elected officials that one of the most valuable assets to a community is a well trained and educated operator. Who has more knowledge of

the system than the people that make it work every day. Accounting, plant operations and plowing snow are acquired skills. The right person for the job. The mayor is elected to represent the best interests of the community. He has the help, support and advice of other board members to make decisions. That's their expertise. The treatment plant has operators whose expertise is operations. The board is there to provide financial support and managerial assistance when necessary. The operator is there to properly operate the facility for the best interest of the community. Best interest of the community is the bottom line. Mr. Operator, talk to your board, they need to know. Too often I hear "they don't want to know". Want and need have two different meanings. Having the facts and not wanting to deal with them can, and will, have adverse consequences. A board member or operator cannot deal in excuses. Things have to get done. What gets accomplished is in the best interest of the community.

Perhaps the quickest way to resolve this is to say, "what happened has happened", and now is the time to start over and get it right. See what "we" as a team can accomplish. Mr. Board member, visit the plant, you might be surprised what wastewater treatment is, and Mr. Operator, take the time to talk to the board. You may find they do have an interest in you and what you provide to the community. If you need someone to introduce you to each other that is what Rural Water is here for. I do believe that if a board and operator do work together, the bottom line will be "the best interest to the community." Nuff said: See ya. 💧