



RECRUITING AND RETENTION

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I realize you have all heard this before, it appears to be discussed over and over, yet the problem still exists.

The demand for professional certified operators has increased and unfortunately our youth are reluctant to even consider this line of work. We all know many of our communities are struggling with this. Is it the low salaries, are the working conditions poor, hours too long, responsibilities too great, is the perception of the job the problem, and are there opportunities for advancement? All good questions.

We have heard stories of a municipality hiring someone, sending them off for costly training and then another system offers that individual a better salary and off they go, so the process begins again. Don't let this happen to you. Please take the time to look at whether or not your utility meets the standard salaries and compensation packages for your region. Consider other areas besides financial compensation that could help you recruit and/or retain your current certified professional operators. For instance, job security, career advancement, merit recognition, raises based on higher certifications, inclusion in the decision process, employee benefits, and support from your elected officials.

More and more people are relying on municipal water and waste services these days. The responsibilities of running these facilities is great and the regulations are complicated and costly. Every certified professional involved in the operation and maintenance of our water and wastewater utilities are well aware of their responsibilities to their customers. They have a strong sense of ethics and values, are highly dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of their community. They are mechanical and require good mathematic skills. They are expected to develop professionally within their career fields. **Allowing them to continue their education and professional development is very important and should be encouraged and supported by the utility and elected officials.**

So where can we find new recruits: job fairs, high schools, colleges, trade schools – possibly. Although, I read somewhere that we need to create our own workers from within or you end up stealing them from another municipality. Encourage school tours of your facilities, promote your utility as a great place to work. Have you ever considered letting a student or a few students job shadow you or your co-workers. Maybe, just maybe, there

is a student out there that has never thought about a career in the water or wastewater field and will find it interesting enough to pursue and possibly ask you for a summer internship mowing lawns and getting to know your facility. We need to start proactively seeking out the younger generations to encourage them to go into our field of work.

I recently read another article where a Boy Scout leader was having a conversation with a Rural Water Representative and telling him what the Scouts needed to fulfill their requirements to obtain their scientist activity badge. The specific requirement was to meet with someone who uses science in their everyday job and what role it plays in their profession. The lightbulb went off and the Rural Water person found a treatment plant and set up a tour. Each Scout was asked to bring a sample of water from their home. The day consisted of an explanation of what water and wastewater system operators do on a daily basis and what role science had in providing safe drinking water and wastewater treatment. Oh and there were so many questions from the scouts. They proceeded to the lab stations and each scout ran several tests on the samples they brought. They discussed the differences when recording the lab results, etc. So to make a long story short, there was great interest among the scouts and who knows, maybe one or more of them would become the next generation of professional system operators. It's time to think outside the box.

We wish to thank the dedicated water and wastewater professionals that serve our communities 24/7 and to all those retiring, we sincerely appreciate your contributions to this industry in providing QUALITY ON TAP. 💧💧💧