



Article By: Charles Stephens, NRWA Senior Executive Policy Director



The goal is to create a lasting impact, ensuring that rural water utilities can respond to cyber incidents and anticipate and prevent them. The success of this program study will hopefully lead to broader national efforts to safeguard critical infrastructure in rural communities, promoting safety, sustainability, and the continued delivery of safe drinking water.

Water/Wastewater Apprenticeships Sustaining Tomorrow

By: Jeff Tumiat, IRWA Apprenticeship Coordinator

As always, it's my pleasure to provide updates about the apprenticeship program both nationally and locally.

As of June 30, 2025, nationwide, there are thirty-five states that have active apprenticeship programs that represent 626 active apprentices, and three hundred forty-five completed graduates. In Illinois, we have 45 active apprentices. Of those, thirty-three are in the water training program, and twelve are in wastewater, of which, several will soon be completing the program, and have already obtained various levels of certification.

We are very proud of all of our apprentices, for not only making the commitment to the industry, but to their selves as well. Water/Wastewater apprenticeships aren't just about filling jobs, they're about safeguarding public health, protecting natural resources, and building resilient communities. By investing in apprenticeships, we ensure that water and wastewater systems remain safe, efficient, and sustainable for generations to come.

In an ongoing effort to recruit career seekers into the Water/Wastewater industry, the Illinois Rural Water Association continues to partner with high schools, community colleges, and trade schools to present at career fairs and events. As our communities grow and infrastructure ages, the demand for skilled professionals in the industry has never been greater. These apprenticeships offer a powerful solution by blending hands-on experience with classroom learning, to prepare the next generation of water/wastewater operators, technicians, and environmental stewards.

A large portion of the water sector's workforce is nearing retirement, creating this urgency to pass down institutional knowledge. Estimates show that about 30 to 50 percent of drinking water and wastewater professionals, will be eligible to retire within the next 5 to 10 years; and that the median age of water/wastewater employees is around 48 years of age. With so many seasoned professionals retiring, utilities struggle to recruit and retain younger workers into these technical roles.

Apprenticeships in these fields, have never been more important. The program can help bridge this gap by creating career pathways for high school graduates, veterans, and career changers, while reducing barriers through paid training.

Apprentices will be working alongside mentors who are experienced professionals, which are willing to pass down their legacy and knowledge to the next generation. All the while ensuring effective knowledge transfer from those experienced operators to the next generation of operations specialists. This is completed by offering classroom instruction covering technical, safety, and regulatory knowledge, while providing career coaching to guide apprentices through certification and advancement.

IRWA currently has several eligible applicants waiting for a chance to get started on their journey in a great career the water and wastewater fields have to offer. If you are thinking of hiring additional staff, please give one of our eligible applicants your consideration. I truly believe that the National Rural Water Apprenticeship Program is changing the tide of the Rural Water Workforce one person at a time, both today and into the future.

"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." – Ryunosuke Satoro



Pictured here is Jake Johnson, IRWA Board member, showing students at the Vermillion County Career Expo how to tap a water main.



IRWA Support Letters Are Needed

IRWA employees are dedicated in helping the water and wastewater systems throughout the state in making onsite visits and providing technical assistance in helping to ensure your systems have safe and quality water. Please take a moment to thank any or all of the IRWA employees who have helped your system by writing an appreciation letter on your letterhead and mail to:

Illinois Rural Water Association*P.O. Box 49*Taylorville, IL 62568



Overview of School Monitoring for Lead

By: Mary Reed, IRWA Compliance Assurance Specialist

With a new school year upon us and new regulations abound, I thought I would provide you with a brief overview of the monitoring for lead in elementary schools and child care facilities.

On November 3, 2023, the Illinois Pollution Control Board adopted the federal Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR) into Illinois State Law. Part of the new rule requires a community water supply (CWS) to monitor for lead in elementary schools and child care facilities constructed prior to January 1, 2014. Sampling is required at least once at each elementary school and child care facility, and upon request after that. Let's dig in and break it down by requirements.

Notification – this section outlines what is required of the CWS when starting out the program. You must first submit a list of all the elementary schools and licensed child care facilities to the Illinois EPA. They will assign sample site IDs for each sampling location within the monitoring site. You are required to send an informational document to each facility about health risks from lead in drinking water. The information provided to schools should be similar to the Public Education for lead that is distributed after a lead action level exceedance.

EPA is working on getting approval for a template for this notification and others. IRWA will provide a link to them on our website once they have been released. In the meantime, we have an IRWA developed FAQ sheet posted at [IRWA School Lead Sampling FAQ.pdf](#)

Annually or more frequently each CWS should provide notice to elementary schools and child care facilities including the following information:

- A proposed schedule for sampling at the facility.
- Information about sampling for lead in schools and child care facilities.
- Instructions for identifying sampling locations and preparing for a sampling event. This should be done at least 30 days prior to monitoring.

If an elementary school or child care facility fails to respond or otherwise declines to participate in lead monitoring, the CWS must document outreach attempts for reporting to the IEPA. In addition, the CWS should contact all secondary schools (junior high and high school) it serves to provide information on health risks from lead in drinking water and how to request lead sampling. This would be similar to the initial notification sent out to the facilities that are required to monitor.

Sampling - Each CWS must collect five samples per school and two samples per child care facility at locations typically used for consumption. The sampling locations must not have a point of use device installed unless **all locations** used for consumption have point of use devices installed.

Elementary schools will be monitored at the following locations:

- Two drinking water fountains.
- One Kitchen faucet used for preparing food or drink.
- Once classroom faucet or other outlet persons use for drinking.
- One nurses office faucet as available

Childcare facilities will be monitored at the following locations:

- One drinking water fountain.
- Either a Kitchen faucet used for preparing food or drink or one classroom faucet or other location that is used for drinking.

If any school or child care facility has fewer than the required number of locations the supplier must sample **all locations used for consumption**. If any school or child care facility does not contain the type of faucets listed above, the supplier must collect a sample from another location within the school or facility that is typically used for consumption.

Methods for Sampling - The supplier must collect all samples from cold water taps that satisfy these specific requirements:

- All samples for lead must be first draw samples.
- All samples must be 250 ml in volume.
- The water must remain stationary in the sampling site's (building's) plumbing system for at least eight but no more than 18 hours before sampling; and
- The CWS must acidify the samples and have a laboratory analyze them using the same analytical methods as routine lead and copper samples.

The samples may be collected by appropriately trained personnel of the water system, school, child care facility, or another appropriately trained person.

Sampling Frequency - Annually, or on an alternative IEPA approved schedule, each supplier must collect samples from **no fewer** than 20% of elementary schools and 20% of child care facilities, until the supplier samples all schools and child care facilities listed in its distribution system that did not decline to participate. The CWS may count an elementary school or child care facility failing to respond or otherwise declining to participate as part of its annual 20% minimum.

The CWS must sample all elementary schools and child care facilities it serves at least once in the five years following January 1, 2025.

After the CWS completes one required cycle of sampling in all elementary schools and child care facilities any additional sampling would be upon request of the elementary school or child care facility.

The CWS must sample at the request of a secondary school. If the CWS receives requests from more than 20% of secondary schools in its distribution system in any of the five years following January 1, 2025, the supplier may schedule the requests which exceed 20% for the following year, and the supplier would not need to sample an individual secondary school more than once during the five-year monitoring cycle.

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At least once every five years, the CWS must confirm that the original list of schools and child care facilities it serves has not changed, if there are changes a revised list should be submitted.

Each CWS must provide the sample results to the school or child care facility as soon as practicable but no later than 30 days after receiving them, with information about remediation options. (not discussed in this article) In addition, the CWS must also provide the analytical results to local and state health departments, as well as to the IEPA.

After the initial sampling for elementary schools and child care facilities ends, annually the CWS must still contact all of the schools and child care facilities in its distribution system to provide the following:

- Information about health risks from lead in drinking water.
- Information about how to request sampling for lead at the facility

Sampling upon Request – Once the CWS has completed the initial round of sampling for each elementary school and child care facilities they must conduct lead sampling for those schools and child care facilities again , but only if it is requested. Requested sampling uses the same sampling methods for the mandatory sampling including providing following information to the facility:

- Instructions for identifying locations for sampling and preparing for sampling at least 30 days before it occurs
- Sampling results

If a supplier receives requests from more than 20% of the schools and child care facilities the supplier listed in its distribution system in a given year, the supplier may schedule sampling for those exceeding 20% for the following year. A supplier needs not sample an individual school or child care facility more than once every five years.

Reporting to the IEPA - Each CWS must report the previous calendar year's activity before July 1st of the current year. The report must contain specific information:

- The CWS must certify that it made a good faith effort to identify schools and child care facilities. The good faith effort may include reviewing customer records and requesting lists of schools and child care facilities from the IEPA. Any CWS that does not serve any schools or child care facilities does not need to include any additional information above the efforts to identify.
- The CWS must certify that it delivered information about health risks from lead in drinking water to the schools and child care facilities it serves.
- The CWS must certify that it completed the notification and sampling at a minimum of 20% of the elementary schools and child care facilities served.

Each year by July 1st, the CWS must certify the following:

- The number of schools and child care served by the CWS.
- The number of schools and child care facilities the CWS sampled during the calendar year.
- The number of schools and child care facilities that refused sampling.
- Information about outreach attempts made to schools or child care facilities that declined monitoring.
- Confirm that the analytical results for all schools and child care facilities sampled in the calendar year were provided to the facilities.

There is a lot to this new regulation, and this article is not inclusive of all the requirements but only an overview. Please feel free to reach out to me at reed@ilrwa.org with any questions.

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