



RURAL WATER STRONG

June 2025
Newsletter

THE ILLINOIS RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

Each year, the National Rural Water Association, and all of its state affiliates such as IRWA, go through the normal funding request process to assure the continuance of priority programs such as ours, but also for the rural funding agencies within the U.S. EPA Revolving Loan Fund, and USDA Rural Development's WEP (Water and Environmental Program). It is imperative that we have the support and continued progressive backing of all of the over 31,000 rural community water and wastewater member systems within all the state associations nationwide (nearly 900 within IRWA). Our total membership numbers, give us a huge impact ability to see this through each year.

We need that kind of support, more than ever, this year in regard to FY-26 funding approvals!

Illinois Rural Water Association asks, to please take the time to contact the office of your U.S. Representative in your District, and both Illinois Senator's offices, to strongly support the continued funding and work of the Illinois Rural Water Association and the National Rural Water Association, as well as the need and support for continuance of the low interest loan and grant funding through Rural Development's WEP, and U.S. EPA's revolving loan fund administered in Illinois by the IEPA.

For specific contact information for Illinois Congressional offices, please use the legislative links provided on the IRWA website under the resources tab.

We continue to need our member community water and wastewater systems, to join in on NRWA's "Rural Water Strong" initiative, by taking the pledge to support RD. It only takes a minute or so to complete the few short form fields. The website to do this is www.ruralwaterstrong.org.

Illinois had previously been in the lead, with most pledge respondents in the nation, until Kansas recently passed us. **Help us to take the lead back from them, by signing the pledge. At this time, we are only 13 behind!**

A new social media testimonial component has recently been added to the campaign. The goal is to flood social media with authentic messages from real rural Americans about the vital importance of Rural Development and WEP. Succinctly, these videos should be:

- 20 seconds or less
- Authentic
- From real rural Americans
- Small Town Mayors
- Utility Managers
- Business Leaders
- School / Daycare Administrators
- Firefighters
- Anyone that is impacted by water and wastewater infrastructure

We strongly encourage your members to share their videos on their own social media, share it through our IRWA social media channels, and upload it on the Rural Water Strong website!

You can upload each video, into NRWA's Rural Water Strong website, and view NRWA CEO, Matt Holmes' short video as well on the ruralwaterstrong.org website.

As always, **we truly appreciate your help and continued support**, in seeing these needed actions to completion. We are one of the strongest state affiliate associations within the National Rural Water Association, but we are only as strong as a true Association, with our continued member's involvement and reaction!

IRWA'S MISSION STATEMENT

"Protecting and preserving the water and wastewater resources of Rural Illinois through education, representation and on-site technical assistance"



Boil Orders: The Good and the Bad

By: Steve Vance, IRWA Training & Technical Assistance Specialist

The concept of a boil order raises an array of emotions from both public water supply officials and customers affected by the issuance of a boil order. For public water supply officials, it typically means that repairs and/or maintenance measures are required along with customer notifications and additional coliform sampling required to lift the boil order. For impacted customers, it introduces some level of inconvenience in boiling water prior to consumption and can represent economic impacts for restaurants, coffee shops, gas stations with fountain beverages and any other businesses that use water for product delivery.

However, for all affected by a boil order, it is important to understand the benefits of issuing a boil order when conditions exist that may adversely affect water quality or where there is known degradation in water quality. Primarily and of most importance, is the use of boil orders during these conditions for the PROTECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH. The protection of public health is the primary goal of all in the potable water supply industry. While the issuance of a boil order may represent some inconveniences, these inconveniences are minor when considered against the potential health impacts of ignoring known risks.

In the mid-1800s it was determined that boiling water was beneficial in eliminating microbiological contamination and reducing the potential for water-borne illnesses. The first known modern boil order advisory was believed to be issued during the cholera outbreaks that occurred in London in the 1860s. More recently, system-wide boil orders were employed in Asheville, North Carolina in response to Hurricane Helene and the impact it had on the Asheville water supply system.

Today, regulatory requirements drive most decisions regarding the issuance of boil orders. From a regulatory perspective, boil orders should be issued when: system water pressure drops below 20 psi, surface water has entered wells or finished water storage reservoirs, surface water treatment anomalies result in finished water turbidity exceeding 1 NTU, routine coliform sampling indicates persistent presence of total coliform or E. coli, routine maintenance of treatment, storage and/or distribution

components results in compromised water quality conditions, and when direct knowledge or suspicion that a water supply has been contaminated. When uncertainty exists, public water supply officials should reach out to the appropriate Regional Office of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) for consultation. "Better safe than sorry" is a logical approach when considering potential impacts to public health.

Diligence should be taken in the notification of customers impacted by a boil order issuance. Every effort must be given in notifying affected customers through local radio/television media, hand delivery (door hangers), signage in conspicuous locations (post office, village hall, restaurants, village entry routes, etc.), telephone (reverse 911) and/or email/text messaging. While notifications can be difficult for system-wide boil orders, a reverse 911 notification system seems the most efficient in notifying a large number of customers. It should also be noted that the County or local health department should be notified immediately after a boil order is issued.

Finally, coliform sampling must be conducted to confirm that water quality has been restored and microbiological contamination has been eliminated. The results of this sampling can be used to determine when the boil order is lifted. It is important to not declare a boil order termination date when doing boil order notifications as the termination of the boil order is dependent on sampling results. The number of samples to be taken is dependent on the area impacted by the boil order and the severity/persistence of the contamination. Sampling guidance should be obtained from IEPA.

Like most aspects regarding public service, transparency is important when communicating the circumstances surrounding the boil order. Information related to the cause of the boil order and the remedial actions to address the boil order are critical in creating a respectful relationship between the community water supply and the customers they serve.

Keep up the great work in protecting the public health. Diligence is better than Complacency!!!



The Silver Tsunami

By: Marc Lemrise, IRWA Apprenticeship Training Instructor

Anyone who has attended IRWA conferences within the last ten years has been hearing of the need for new certified operators in the drinking water and wastewater treatment field. Mostly driven by retirements, (silver tsunami) the situation doesn't seem to be getting any better. Only 1% of certified operators are under the age of 25. Though there are many other career opportunities in water treatment, such as lab technicians, customer service representatives, and maintenance personnel, certified operators are most in demand. Anyone holding even the lowest level of certification can expect an entry-level job offer almost immediately. Those with higher certification levels will enjoy the ability to negotiate higher salaries and better benefits as utility organizations bid for their service.

Although there are no published statistics for Illinois, nationwide, the average age of a certified water or wastewater operator is 48 years. Not all that old at least from my perspective. The State of Mississippi lists the average age of their operators at 54. Texas: 56. Most of those operators will retire within the next ten years, exacerbating an already critical shortage of these experienced personnel. The state of Maine has seen a 24% decline in its water workforce in the last eight years.

So, what is being done to address this? There are some efforts underway to attract younger people to this field via training programs, apprenticeships, and community outreach to inform prospective employees that a career in water treatment can be a rewarding choice; both financially and personally. Additionally, the USEPA has launched the Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce

Development Program, providing grants to expand career opportunities in the water sector.

IRWA has been doing it's share to alleviate the shortage through ongoing training programs for the currently certified operator and aspiring operators as well. Our water and wastewater trainers, Dave McMillan and Steve Vance conduct continuing education classes all over the state. You can find these listed on our website. Our Circuit Riders and wastewater technicians provide one-on-one training for state competency exams, and the apprenticeship program has a pool of eligible applicants ready to be hired. Apprentices get on-the-job training along with 288 hours of related technical instruction consisting of a combination of self-study, on-line classes and in-person instruction once a month. This is an opportunity to earn while they learn as opposed to accruing thousands in student loan debt. If your system anticipates a need for new operators, please consider hiring from this group as they are genuinely interested in breaking into this line of work. Likewise, people considering entering this field are encouraged to add their name to the eligible applicants list by contacting our apprenticeship program coordinator, Jeff Tumati. Details are on the IRWA website.

This situation will not be easy to solve. Addressing this shortage will require coordinated efforts across federal, state and local levels to continue developing the workforce to ensure a sustainable number of qualified individuals involved in maintaining our water infrastructure, protecting public health, and preserving the natural environment.



Administrative Conference Holiday Inn * Effingham, IL

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- ◆ *Municipal Bonds 101*
- ◆ *Billing Software*
- ◆ *Retaining Employees with Simple Technology*
- ◆ *Boil Orders and Utility Communications*
- ◆ *Ethics/Whistleblower Policies*
- ◆ *Records Retention*
- ◆ *Personnel Records Review Act*
- ◆ *J.U.L.I.E. Positive Response System*

This day and a half conference geared towards clerks and office staff will be held July 17 & 18, 2025. Agenda and registration can be found linked from the homepage at www.ilrwa.org. Cost is \$165.00 for IRWA members before the July 4th deadline.

• • • • •

IRWA Staff Members

Executive Director

Don Craig (craig@ilrwa.org)

Deputy Director

Roger Noe (noe@ilrwa.org)

Chief Membership Officer / Chief Event Coordinator

Heather McLeod (ilrwahm@ilrwa.org)

Chief Financial Officer / Chief Publications Officer

Denise Burke (ilrwadb@ilrwa.org)

Circuit Rider #1 / Director of Field Staff Programs

Evan Jones (jones@ilrwa.org)

Circuit Rider #2

Jason Cochran (cochran@ilrwa.org)

Circuit Rider #3

Chuck Woodworth (ilrwacw@ilrwa.org)

Circuit Rider #4

Marc Lemrise (lemrise@ilrwa.org)

Wastewater Technician #1

Jeff McCready (mccready@ilrwa.org)

Wastewater Technician #2

Scott Tozier (tozier@ilrwa.org)

USDA Source Water Protection Specialist

Richmond Adams (adams@ilrwa.org)

State Funded EPA Technician

Clark Cameron (cameron@ilrwa.org)

Energy Efficiency Circuit Rider

Dave Speagle (speagle@ilrwa.org)

EPA Training Specialist

Dave McMillian (mcmillan@ilrwa.org)

Steve Vance (vance@ilrwa.org)

EPA WW Training Specialist

Kent Cox (cox@ilrwa.org)

Apprenticeship Coordinator

Jeff Tumiatì (tumiatì@ilrwa.org)

Compliance Assistance Specialist

Mary Reed (reed@ilrwa.org)

PLEASE SAVE THE DATE!

ILLINOIS RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

22ND ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

WHEN: FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 2025

10:00 A.M. SHOT GUN START

EDGEWOOD GOLF CLUB

AUBURN, ILLINOIS



PLEASE JOIN US FOR ANOTHER FUN FILLED DAY WITH PEERS!
Look for more information on our website at www.ilrwa.org and in the mail.