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MISSION STATEMENT

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

On the Cover:

This photo was taken by Roger Noe, Deputy Director,

in St. Libory, Illinois.

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H.R. Bill 7944 - Support Needed!

On behalf of the over 875 water and wastewater utility members of the Illinois Rural Water Association (IRWA), that serves a combined population of 1,494,353; I want to express our concern over the recent designation of PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under CERCLA. This designation threatens to place the financial burden of environmental cleanup on water systems and their ratepayers – instead of on the polluters responsible for the contamination.

We respectfully ask for your support, of H.R. 7944 – the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act which will provide for statutory protections to shield water systems from liability under CERCLA for PFAS, ensuring that manufacturers and users of these chemicals, not the public, pay for cleanup costs. From its inception, CERCLA's "polluter pays" principle was meant to hold accountable those who produced and profited from hazardous substances that contaminated the environment. However, the designation of PFOA and PFOS – persistent "forever chemicals" now widely found in the environment – puts drinking water and wastewater systems at risk of facing cleanup liability, even though they merely receive these substances through upstream contamination.

With the EPA's designation of PFAS under CERCLA, which took effect on July 8, 2024, our water systems are now vulnerable to "cost-share" litigation from PFAS manufacturers. These companies can use litigation to shift their cleanup costs onto water utilities, which in turn pass these costs to ratepayers. Even if water systems successfully defend against such claims, the legal expenses will exacerbate the growing challenge of water affordability.

CERCLA liability would only add to the significant costs utilities are already incurring to meet PFAS regulations under the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act. It is unfair to ask ratepayers to bear these additional costs for environmental remediation that should rightfully be the responsibility of the companies that produced and profited from PFAS for decades.

With the final rule now in effect, it is urgent that Congress act quickly to protect water systems and their ratepayers from unfair PFAS cleanup liability. We strongly urge Illinois Rural Water Association community water and wastewater system members, to contact their U.S. Congressman or Congresswoman, to co-sponsor and support H.R. 7944 – the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act, introduced by



Reps. John Curtis (R-UT) and Marie Gluesenkamp-Perez (D-WA). This bipartisan bill preserves the "polluter pays" principle and allows water utilities to remain focused on delivering safe, affordable water without being unfairly saddled with costly litigation and liability.

It is imperative, that our Association acts in unity, along with all the other state rural water affiliates that are part of the National Rural Water Association, to take strong and progressive action to insure that HR 7944, The Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act is enacted to protect rural systems across the nation from unwarranted liability.



by Don Craig, IRWA Executive Director

Rate Study Ramblings

by Clark Cameron, IRWA State Circuit Rider

I started at IRWA as a state funded Circuit Rider in August of 2018. My main job responsibilities are to do rate studies and financial assistance for water/wastewater systems throughout the state. I serve the whole state from north to south and east to west; so, I have seen quite a wide variety of different rate structures and philosophies about those. I have seen community systems that were in severe financial trouble and others that were very financially secure. Also, I have worked with communities that were willing to do everything possible to provide for the future and others that were stuck in the past with no desire to move forward. But regardless of the local sentiment, the one thing every community must realize is that your water and wastewater departments are a business and must be managed as such.

I have seen communities that have not raised rates in 20 years, and were subsidizing the losses through TIF money or the general fund to the detriment of the overall well-being of the community. To communities like this, I try to stress that those funds are for other purposes and in some cases cannot legally be used to cover operating losses for the utility departments. Many times, the Board doesn't want to raise rates because of the negative public response. In these cases, I stress that it is the Board's responsibility to make unpopular decisions that are for the good of the community. I also let the Board know that I will come to their public meeting and explain all of the results of the rate study and the recommendations that were made to the public with the documentation to defend the results. Hopefully, this will ease the pressure on the Board to make the hard decisions. At the end of the day, all that matters is ensuring the revenues cover the expenses of the water or sewer department, and that future needs are being thought of also.

The purpose of a rate study is to help ensure that the revenues do, in fact, cover the cost of running the department and to review all of the numbers involved with the amount of water produced, gallons billed, rates, and number of customers to arrive at a fair rate. That seems pretty simple on the surface. But, the study also forces communities to take a closer look at how they do business. It lets them know if they have excessive water loss and helps them with solutions to lessen the loss. In some cases, it helps clerks and billing personnel become more familiar with their billing systems and find potential billing glitches. That has happened more than once. In one case, the error cost the Village around \$100,000.00 annually. A rate study also forces communities to look to the future, and what the needs of the community will be not next year, but 10 years down the road.

When IRWA performs a rate review for a water and/or wastewater system, the well-being of that community and of its

citizens are the most important factors for me to consider. I want to be certain that the municipality or district is financially secure going forward, but I also want to be fair to the customers. I consider all future needs of the those departments, while also remembering that many families are



struggling financially and try to find a rate that everyone can live with. It doesn't always happen that way, but that is the goal.

If I can give just one quick piece of advice, it would be for the Board of every community system to adopt an ordinance that establishes a 3% annual increase in the rates to try to keep pace with COLA. If you wait 10 years, you are 30% behind, and suddenly you must make a huge increase that people notice and are upset about. Three percent annually, usually goes relatively unnoticed.

Remember to call IRWA for any questions or help that you may need with regard to your rates or having a rate study performed for your community water and/or wastewater system.. And, feel free to contact my email directly: cameron@ilrwa.org or call 217-287-2115 for the office.



The Age-Old Question

During my tenure with Illinois EPA, one of the most contentious topics was related to the water main verse service line question. As more water districts developed, this question became more prevalent as rural residents looked for ways to secure a safe, adequate and affordable source of water. The problem then became finding a means of transmitting water from the source to rural customers while maintaining water quality in an economically feasible manner. Based on my experience and interpretation, Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB) regulations provide that means.

To explain, it is important to understand the difference between a water main and a service line. A water main, by regulatory definition, is any pipe for the purpose of distributing potable water that serves or is accessible to more than one property, dwelling or rental unit and is exterior to buildings. In contrast, a water service line is defined as any pipe from the water main or source of potable water supply that serves or is accessible to not more than one property, dwelling or rental unit of the user. While these definitions appear simplistic and may not make a clear distinction, some clarification can be found diving further into the regulations.

Specifically, Title 35, Subpart F, Section 604.1455 states: 1) a community water supply must not supply water through a water service line to more than a single property, dwelling or rental unit; 2) If a pipe from the water main or source of potable water supply is accessible to more than one property, dwelling or rental unit, the pipe will be considered a water main subject to all permitting requirement of 35 Illinois Administrative Code 602; and finally, 3) a pipe is accessible when it crosses the property boundary of another landowner to reach the property, dwelling or rental unit being served.

When revising the regulations in 2019, the IPCB attempted to add clarification by defining the term "accessible". Prior to these revisions, debate typically revolved around the meaning of accessible and whether that term meant legally or physically accessible. Obviously, the regulatory revisions clarified this by stating that a pipe is accessible when it crosses a property boundary and therefore, must be permitted by Illinois EPA as a water main.

With this clarification, the obvious question would be how can water quality be maintained when serving minimal customers and usage through a 3-inch or 4-inch water main? We know that water age is our worst enemy and promotes the depletion of disinfectants and provides and environment for microbial growth. As an example, if a rural family with three residents were served by a 3-inch water main that ran from the source to their home one-half mile from that source and the three residents used approximately 50 gallons/day each, it would take approximately six and one-half days for the family to use all of the water in that 3-inch water main. These circumstances would likely create an environment for deterioration of water quality.

by Steve Vance, IRWA Training Specialist



To address this

potential water quality issue, IPCB regulations at 604.145(b) provide an avenue for Illinois EPA to approve alternative design, maintenance or operation requirements other than those contained in Part 604 as long as the alternative design meets the water quality requirements of Part 601.101 and the standards included in Part 611. Essentially this means that an alternative to the 3-inch minimum water main for serving rural areas with limited service connections and water usage can be proposed with sufficient evidence that water quality will not be impacted and adequate quantity and pressure requirements are maintained.

Finally, I was recently made aware that systems are being asked to identify "undersized" water mains during the sanitary survey process. For systems with undersized water mains that do not experience water quality issues and meet the pressure and quantity provisions as a result of the undersized main(s), the IPCB provides relief from replacement requirements in Section 604.145 as long as certain criteria are met. Specifically, Section 604.145 states that a community water supply operating before July 26, 2019 is not required to modify or replace components to meet Part 604 if the conditions described above are met.

Hopefully, this provides some insight and direction to the regulatory requirements regarding the age-old question related to water main verse water service line and what "undersized water mains" require replacement. As I prefaced initially, this is my interpretation derived from several years of experience (I am closer to being 70 than I am 50). Enforcement of the regulations is the responsibility of the Illinois EPA; however, their interpretation/implementation of the regulation can be the subject of review/appeal by the IPCB.

Hope to see you soon at one of our training sessions and keep doing the good work!!!

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IRWA Video Inspection Services

Did you know Illinois Rural Water Association can assist you with video inspection services? Many of you are aware of this service that we offer, and have had a video inspection done one or more times to address maintenance issues in your collection or storm sewer systems. But, there are also systems out there that are not aware of this service that IRWA can provide, as they may be new to the water and wastewater industry. So, let's take a look at what IRWA has to offer and what types of issues that can be found during these inspections. IRWA has 2 types of

camera services, push camera and what Scott and I call the tractor camera.

Both Wastewater Techs, myself and Scott Tozier,



have push cameras available for inspections. These cameras are good for 100 to 125 feet depending on pipe size, pipe material and how clean the pipe is; and have the capability of recording

the inspection on a flash drive which can be downloaded to your system's computer.

These cameras can be used on pipe as small as



3 in. up to 8 - 10 in. (anything larger than that, and the camera may be to small to see what you are looking for or the cable will ride up the side of the pipe and flip over coming back towards

the manhole). We generally have good luck with these inspections finding broken pipes, tree root intrusion, and fiber-optic cable or gas lines bored



through the pipe. Also, it will show lines needing a good jet

by Jeff McCready, IRWA Wastewater Technician

cleaning, and even a claw hammer laying in the pipe...yes, a claw hammer. This camera service is free to IRWA members systems

The Association also has and uses an Envirosight Pan and Tilt tractor camera that allows the camera to rotate 360 degrees

continuously in one direction. Pipe sizes are a minimum of 6" up to 18". The inspection details sizes, material and length of pipe. In addition, any defects and service





taps will be documented with details and photos. We adapt to

different sizes of pipe with a simple quick change of the wheels. The Envirosight Video inspection is a fee based program (in order to cover the costs of upkeep



and maintenance of the equipment used). And, a proposal (contract) must be agreed to and signed in advance of the inspection. Upon completion of the inspection, you will receive a detailed report including graphic diagrams of the inspection features and correlating digital video file for visual reference.

If you would like more information about the video inspection, contact myself or Scott Tozier. To schedule an inspection contact Deputy Director, Roger Noe at noe@ilrwa.org or at 217-820-1564.

As always, keep up the good work and stay safe out there.



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The Dangers of Microplastics in the Rural Water Supply

by Richmond Adams, IRWA Sourcewater Protection Specialist

Microplastics—tiny plastic particles that are less than 5 millimeters in size—are becoming an increasing threat to ecosystems and human health. Once thought to primarily affect urban and industrial regions, these particles have begun infiltrating water supplies in rural communities as well. Their presence in rivers, lakes, groundwater, and even household wells is raising alarms about the risks they pose to both the environment and public health.

The infiltration of microplastics into rural water supplies often occurs through several channels. One significant source is agricultural runoff, which can carry synthetic fibers from fertilizers, plastic mulch, and other farming equipment. These materials degrade over time, fragmenting into microplastics that enter local waterways. Additionally, wastewater from nearby urban areas, which often contains microplastic pollutants from household products such as synthetic clothing, cosmetics, and personal care products, can reach rural areas through rivers and streams. As these pollutants spread through irrigation systems or natural bodies of water, they increasingly threaten the purity of water supplies.

Once microplastics enter water systems, their small size allows them to persist in the environment, accumulating over time. They are not biodegradable and are resistant to natural degradation processes. Over time, these particles can settle in riverbeds and lakes, disrupting aquatic ecosystems. Fish and other wildlife often mistake microplastics for food, leading to ingestion. This can cause physical harm or introduce toxic chemicals into the food chain as microplastics absorb pollutants from surrounding water. The eventual transfer of these toxins to humans through consumption of contaminated fish and other



aquatic species is a growing concern.

For rural communities, many of which rely on untreated or minimally treated water sources, the presence of microplastics in water supplies poses serious health risks. Microplastics can act as carriers for



harmful pathogens and pollutants, such as heavy metals and endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Ingesting microplastics through drinking water may lead to long-term health issues, including inflammation, respiratory problems, and potential disruptions to the immune and reproductive systems. Although the full extent of microplastic toxicity in humans is still being studied, early research suggests that chronic exposure could have significant adverse effects on human health.

Addressing the issue of microplastics in rural water systems presents a unique set of challenges. Traditional water treatment methods, particularly in smaller, less developed areas, are often ineffective at filtering out microplastics due to their minute size. Implementing advanced filtration technologies is costly, and many communities may lack the financial resources or infrastructure to upgrade their water systems. Additionally, stricter regulations on plastic usage and agricultural practices are needed to prevent further contamination, but such policies are often slow to develop.

The presence of microplastics is an emerging environmental and public health issue that requires urgent attention. While the full scope of their impact is still being discovered, it is clear that they pose both immediate and long-term threats. Protecting water sources from microplastic contamination will require a combination of improved agricultural practices, better waste management systems, and investment in advanced water treatment technologies. Without these efforts, the safety and sustainability of water supplies may be at risk for generations to come.

Tracking Wastewater Lagoon System's Greatest Liability

by Scott Tozier, IRWA Wastewater Technician

One of the greatest expenses to a community, as far as wastewater systems are concerned, is the amount of sludge that accumulates in your lagoon treatment system. Most operators have no idea how much sludge has been deposited in the bottom of their lagoons and they rarely investigate it until the system is out of compliance.

I get calls several times a year from systems that have received a Violation Notice for Non-Compliance from IEPA, and usually the first thing they ask is, if the system has had a recent sludge survey done to the lagoon treatment system. High levels of TSS and BOD in the effluent, can be signs of excess sludge accumulations in the system.

IRWA performs sludge surveys at no cost to the member communities of Illinois. All that is needed is a boat and staff to help perform the survey. The Wastewater Technician will provide all necessary equipment to do the survey, and he will compile the data from the survey and send a report to the operator in charge. These surveys can keep track of how quickly the sludge in the facility is accumulating over the years, and The Wastewater Technician can make recommendations to help reduce the build-up of sludge, as well as increase efficiency of the treatment process by addition of bacteria products that can be purchased through various vendors.

Usually when a lagoon treatment system gets to the age of

most of the systems in Illinois, it's time to remove sludge from the lagoon. Some systems seem to have very little sludge in them, and others seem to be higher than normal; which can be attributed to design or higher levels of Inflow and Infiltration than normal. The usual rate at which systems gain sludge, is said to be 1 inch per year in the primary cell. I've



seen levels of sludge range all over the place, so it's vital for your community to track this rate and be able to plan for the removal of sludge on a time-table that they can control.

The alternative to this plan is a timing that state regulators control, and can be as little as 1 year after the issuance of a violation notice from IEPA; which can put communities in a

continued on page 18





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Tracking Wastewater Lagoon System's Greatest Liability continued from page 10

pinch to come up with funding and proceed with a project that they had no previous knowledge of.

I've performed over 15 sludge surveys in the last 2 years, and get requests monthly to perform them. If the facility doesn't have a boat or the staff to assist in the survey, then there are contractors that can do the survey for a fee. The cost can be anywhere from \$1500 to \$4000 for the service, but can provide a comprehensive view of accumulations of sludge, and also point out issues in the lagoon treatment systems design.

Some providers of sonar sludge surveys include, Water Treatment Technologies, Stewart Spreading, and Rhino Industries, as well as others. These surveys can pin down precise quantities of sludge in the system and can show if bacteria treatments are actually reducing or slowing the amount of sludge being deposited in the system. IRWA sludge surveys can provide a general assessment of the sludge in the lagoon, but is only meant to be used as an overall guide to the state of the facility.

If you would like more information on sludge surveys, or would like to inquire about having one done for your lagoon treatment system, please call the IRWA office and they can put you in touch with the Wastewater Technician in your area.

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