



Meeting Notes
Drinking Water Advisory Group
September 13, 2021
9:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Agenda Item	Notes
<p>2. Drought/Wildfire Update Sheryl Howe, Hydrogeologist</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ National drought monitor; weekly updates. Based on soil moisture, USGS stream flow percentage, precipitation, and Palmer Drought Severity Index. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exceptional drought conditions. ◆ No change in last week. ◆ Forecast from NOAA: temps normal and possible slightly above average precipitation. ◆ La Nina expected to develop. ◆ Soil moisture deficits from last winter are too large to erase with coming rains. ◆ Water supply joint legislative committee: can allocate monies for drought response. Need feedback through survey we sent out. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Committee will have second meeting to hear from Ag and DF&W. ◆ For WA: one system is trucking water since surface supply is exhausted. ◆ \$266k for drought from Ecology. Used for trucking water, etc. ◆ Fire: One new start, 25 existing. Some very small, she monitors three. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knows how many water systems within reach of fires. ○ Less new starts. ◆ Drinking water is where the impact is going to be. Telling your story through the survey is important to get to the legislature.
<p>3. PFAS Rulemaking Update Mike Means, Capacity Development and Policy Manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Rule out for public written comment, small team in the middle of going through comments to provide answers, last minute tweaks, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hope to finish at the end of this week. ○ Will do responsive comments at board review. ◆ SBOH meeting Oct 13; formal public hearing. ◆ Working on lab contracts. Utilities have already volunteered. Tied into EPA funding. ◆ Conducting trainings explaining the rule; ERWOW, others. <p>Questions</p> <p>Q: Jeff Johnson RWCP: Public language that utilities could comment on. A: Mike Means: In process of developing public education language, public notice, etc. Meeting this PM. Will get info out soon.</p> <p>Q: Derek Pell: Any funding left for more utilities to get sampled? A: Yes, there is still funding available. Email requests to: ODW.WQCompliance@doh.wa.gov.</p> <p>Q: Drew Noble: When will we receive the test to take as operators? A: Mike Means: Have to finalize contracts, EPA approves, can't give exact date. May take until Oct before getting tests out the door.</p> <p>Derrick Dennis: We will send email with kits with sampling instructions/tips.</p>



4. Operator Certification and Training Update/Discussion
Bill Bernier, Operator Certification and Training Section Manager

- ◆ Operator Certification. Reiterate that you (WS) are the key to economic and environmental vitality. We need to hear from you so that we know we're doing the right thing and helping out. You can send an email or contact your favorite regulator.
 - ◆ About 3,000 public drinking water systems in WA required to have a certified operator(s).
 - Roughly 4,000 certified operators, 1,700 backflow assembly testers.
 - In 2020, reviewed 850 exam applications. Included 224 new cert ops.
 - 115 new backflow assembly testers.
 - Challenger year to certify operators.
 - ◆ Accurate email address is vital to communication. Update on your WFI or at Washington Certification Services. We send a lot of things via email.
 - ◆ Two things: big spikes in people leaving the industry. End of 2021 will be the next big cycle. Around 400 people expected to leave/retire.
 - Plenty of vacancies. Very consistent over the years.
 - ◆ Second big thing is brand new operators entering the industry.
 - WA has a big population growth, but not a corresponding growth in certified operators. Rural areas growing faster than I-5 corridor.
 - New technologies, more people to deal with. New regulations and training, training requirements. More going on now than 15 years ago.
 - Infrastructure starting to fail.
 - Rural operators wear many hats, have many duties—heavy workload. Can seem overwhelming to new operators who don't have experience and knowledge.
 - ◆ Job availability—who, what, when, how do we hire. Where do new operators come from? Then how do we keep them?
 - ◆ Operators identified as essential workforce and maybe they should get paid more.
 - ◆ Job availability. Need to meet minimum education requirements and experience for certification level.
 - ◆ A high school graduate needs 12 years of experience/education to become a WTPO4. Two years' operating experience, additional two years water related experience (flexible). Sixteen years of education means high school or GED, and one of following: four-year college degree, 120 college semester credits, 180 college quarter credits, or 180 CEUs of relevant water system training. May substitute one year experience for each year of education through twelfth grade; two years operation experience for each year of college education.
 - ◆ How can we support workforce development? Audience discussion.
- Drew Noble:** Small system perspective. Once we get them trained, they move to larger utility and have to start over again. Have to start as part-time operator. SMAs don't always visit the system they operate. Should board members be certified as well?
- Ernie:** Apprenticeship program. Need utilities to hire these people as journeymen, etc. Get people foundational training they need. Entry level



position to gain experience. Sustainability, resiliency, capacity development—all rely on certifying and training operators. Need to push in the right direction/funding. Some small towns don't have resources to bring on OIT. Funding to help small systems first, then work to develop larger systems. Running out of operators to steal from each other. Maybe compensation. OJT training facilities. Programs are out there, ERWOW. Getting utilities to commit to bringing people on and where do they get the funding.

Dan Sander: Get them right in high school. Summer jobs may be option. Follow L&I rules. Smaller utilities may have better chance to get younger people involved. Percentage of salary program: higher education council, work study program. One engineer who started out that way is still with the utility; another retired. Great program; may be others out there. Worked with local college/community college. Bring someone on for the summer and invest in them. May plant the seed that utility work is a viable career field.

Mike Means: Questions: what does it mean to work for a utility? We ask for two years' experience. What experience actually makes someone eligible? Closer look at duties performed that qualifies them.

Ernie: would need to work through L&I to find criteria for interns/students can do under the law. Some equipment can't be used until a certain age. Can bring them in for groundwork training. Find what's acceptable from L&I.

Mike Means: What's the minimum standards of qualification? Demonstrate certain competencies.

Dan Sanders: Veteran's competencies. What's happened with that? They had Air Force guys who became operators. If work experience is somewhat related, it needs to be recognized.

Bill Bernier: veterans have a lower unemployment rate than other groups. Expanded evaluation for jobs in the military.

Jeff: wondering how we view hiring employee from contractor. Can they get credit for installing water system components? CEUs: are available for DWAG type meetings where important issues are discussed. Encourage more middle level people involved in these meetings and processes.

Bill Bernier: we would accept installation as experience. For meetings, have them apply to [Washington Certification Services](#) for CEUs for meetings. That's the first step. Meetings must be three hours long with relevant information.

Ian Black: CEUs are fairly limited; would like to see trench safety, CPR, things needed in the field. Rationed CEUs, after 20 years, run out of effective CEUs.

Bill Bernier: these are all approved for CEUs except CPR. Talk to the instructors and ensure they've applied for CEUs.

Ian Black: may need to look at how they're available., may not have wide availability.

Bill Bernier: it's an online form now. Fill out a month before the class. Instructors need to take that first step and let us know it's available.

Ernie: Great job with veterans. Have hired veterans. Apprenticeship program is VA approved. A lot of vets look for funding and VA benefits. Some limitation



	<p>in regard to training. Don't recognize QUEST but do recognize full apprenticeship. Going to work with JBLM.</p> <p>Bill Bernier: Professional Growth deadline is December 31. Online classes, etc. Can get full three credits with online class or exam. Don't wait until the last minute. Call Bill (William.Bernier@doh.wa.gov or 360-236-3562) or Washington Certification Services if you're struggling.</p> <p>Prohibition on shutoffs expires at the end of the month. Expecting a lot of shutoffs. LIHWAP available, workshop available on Thursday. Check out our Customer Assistance Program webpage.</p> <p>Let us know what you need. We need to hear about workforce issues. Your voice is more powerful than mine.</p>
<p>5. Water System Issues and Goals for the Next Five to Ten Years Discussion with Breakout Sessions Mike Means, Capacity Development and Policy Manager</p>	<p>Breakout session with small groups and report back.</p> <p>Group 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ PFAS and Manganese. More information on communicating with customers. Liability what are we doing with it, how to dispose of it, are we increasing utilities' liability?◆ Funding challenges to meet requirements. Finding operators capable of working on small systems and retaining them.◆ HOAs and mobile home parks within systems, they buy water through single meter, but not classified as a system, keeps them from options for small systems.◆ Water rights in general, City of Sumner pursuing for many years at considerable cost. <p>Group 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Water quality concerns, state and Fed working at different rates for different contaminants. State level moving faster. Focus on keeping contaminants out instead of removing when already in the system.◆ Bringing more professionalism to ownership, management, and decision making and identify money to be able to do that.◆ Staffing and infrastructure.◆ More rigorous rule and less funding to address them, especially small systems.◆ How to facilitate consolidation and restructuring of small systems. <p>Group 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Infrastructure maintenance/replacement. Need help to inform customers of cost and rate impacts over time. Some projects canceled because materials costs have risen steeply.◆ GMA impacts that have. Changes in zoning and available supplies, construction issues that may not be considered by local government, etc. for infrastructure construction and upgrades.◆ Master builders requesting standardized fees, connections across utilities.◆ Emergency response plans, putting together risk assessments. Seismic resilience work needs. Awareness of utilities of cost and things to be done. Not considered on a wide basis.



- ◆ PFAS—Long term costs related to it. How to dispose of. Long term infrastructure replacement when PFAS equipment fails. Lead and Copper Rule. Formal review studies?
- ◆ Water supplies. Water rights how to get and retain. How it impacts failing smaller system consolidating into larger. How to conserve water, public education. Partnership with Ecology.

Group 4

- ◆ Covered above issues.
- ◆ Access to DOH information, historical project files and talk to regional staff. No longer able to do this.
- ◆ Difference in LHJ capacity to support water infrastructure. Staff diverted to other things, also staff funding mechanisms is very different depending on county organizational structure. One with strong program might charge more, another that doesn't may charge minimal fee.
- ◆ Asset management, rate setting, restructuring and consolidation, capacity development.
- ◆ Boards: change from member to trustee to convey their responsibility over the asset now and into the future.

Group 5

- ◆ SMA program, how to meet needs with limited time resources while protecting existing customers.
- ◆ Ensure participation in forming regional groups. Very helpful.
- ◆ Water rights issues, share resources, how worked through issues.
- ◆ Management and board training.
- ◆ Plan review, timing and clear instructions, project reviews and how ties into sanitary surveys. How to do work, especially now.

Group 6

- ◆ Workforce future.
- ◆ Federal infrastructure bill: hope for more funding for workforce issues.
- ◆ Using Op-in-training option.
- ◆ Work with Bill Bernier on regulation changes. Language Oregon had for operators who are lacking less than one step below next level. We need to build from that.
- ◆ SMAs tasked, running out of operators. Use combination of contract operators.
- ◆ LCR revision, need to know what state expectations are for documentation with replacement of fixtures.
- ◆ PFAS, Group A program—what does that mean for Group Bs, funding.
- ◆ How to apply/qualify for funding. Equity issues, having time/ability to apply for funding.
- ◆ Value of Water Campaign—restart. Emphasize the cost of running a system—infrastructure and workforce.
- ◆ WUE—funding of additional training on audits. Ties into conservation and drought response. Equity and affordability issues.
- ◆ CCR is what it is.



- ◆ Looking for ways to automate monthly report, especially for smaller systems.
- ◆ Small system workshops. Get back to educating boards, councils, etc.
- ◆ Question: Are vaccines required for those who use federal funding?

Group 7

- ◆ Most topics discussed.
- ◆ Operator certification, we need DOH help to keep that as a career path option and provide opportunities, apprenticeship and summer programs.
- ◆ PFAS need more clarity. Know work is being done on requirements, etc. Funding options for initials as well as ongoing costs.
- ◆ Asset management.
- ◆ Hoping to see DOH staff back in the field working with operators once staff time is more available. Very helpful to work with staff.

Group 8

- ◆ Operator certification challenges. Outreach to high schools, trade school training, and job placement. Outreach to minority communities.
- ◆ CCC staff hasn't grown, but demand has.
- ◆ PWB, funding needs. Desire for funding outpaces available amounts.
- ◆ LCR—appropriate rates, how to forecast expenses.
- ◆ Inflationary capital costs, how to budget.
- ◆ Source protection and capacity future challenges.
- ◆ Utility tax to support PWB and assistance, taxing water and charging right-of-way rent problematic.

Group 9

- ◆ Many of the same issues.
- ◆ Impacts of disconnection, how to help customers get caught up. Cost of pumping water grows b/c of drought.
- ◆ Federal land grant.
- ◆ OpCert, BAT certification. More locations to test.
- ◆ Increase education and info on UCMR. Help utilities know this is coming key messages, etc.
- ◆ How to help DOH employees have more field experience?
- ◆ In-person training.
- ◆ Cybersecurity. How can we support utilities; regulatory; what does it look like.
- ◆ Environmental justice.
- ◆ Capacity development—we have CD addressed in planning program, but can only address largest utilities, how to get better.
- ◆ Transition our data system. Gain/loss? CCR rider. May be able to draft by pulling from state data system. More functionality.
- ◆ Funding for PFAS.
- ◆ Arsenic, other toxins, acute contaminants. Ecology, Ag, DW.
- ◆ LCR, inventory requirement, how to help.
- ◆ Emergency response, what does it look internally and externally? DOH role in regional participation.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Staffing workload postponement. How to navigate getting critical work done and letting go of other pieces and still meet needs. <p>Thank you for your thoughts. We'll talk about prioritizing and moving forward.</p>
<p>5. Agenda Ideas for next Meeting Brian Sayrs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Consolidate ideas and responses for next meeting.◆ Potential L&I plumbing requirement.◆ Manganese.◆ Email Brian.Sayrs@doh.wa.gov if you have any ideas.