

One-hundred-seventy-first meeting  
 Water and Wastewater Advisory Council  
 Wednesday, June 22, 2022  
 Teams Meeting, Montana

**CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was held via Teams and began at 1:31 p.m. Council members present: John Alston, Logan McInnis, Andy Loudermilk, Craig Woolard, Nick Clos, Ron Edwards, and Greg Olsen.

Department personnel attending all or portions of the meeting: Libby Murray-Henrikson, Operator Certification Program Supervisor, Jen VandenBos, Operator Certification Data Tech, Reta Therriault, Operator Certification Data Tech, and Darryl Barton, Section Supervisor

<b>Minutes Approved</b>	John Alston called the meeting to order, and the previous meeting minutes were approved as written.
<b>Council Member Updates</b>	Group went around and introduced themselves. Nick Clos is the newest member. John Alston announced this will be his last meeting. His term ends October 1, 2022, and he will not be reapplying.
<b>Public Water Supply Bureau Updates</b>	Greg Olsen reported that he is now acting Division Administrator for the Water Quality Division. Amy Steinmetz has moved to the Waste Management and Remediation Division as the Division Administrator. There are currently 2 positions that are out for hire within the Public Water Supply Section. One for the monitoring and reporting section – in the interview stage and one for the data group. Libby reported that the data position has an offer out for hire. Greg reported on the flooding around the state. Red Lodge is off their boil water order, Fromberg is still on their boil water advisory, Gardiner is off their boil water advisory, Silvergate will be having their boil water order rescinded. Pine Crest trailer court has had a boil water advisory issued.
<b>Miles City Spring School Update</b>	Craig gave an update on the Miles City Spring School. He said it was a successful school. 112 total were registered. Of that number, 94 were operators. They tried the Miles City location as an experiment and work with Miles City College. Most attendees appreciated it being there. The vast majority agreed it was a good conference. The length and format was good. From the survey results, it was shown the DEQ and the operator training calendar is the major correspondent to get the word and get people signed up for the school. At the school, the tried new topics. There was a focus on water distribution, did a full day on SCADA. There were some comments the longer classes had too much stuff covered and it was geared towards larger systems. The asset management and leadership training went well. The hands-on valve class, water loss control, and water main disinfection seemed to be reasonably successful. Craig asked for some input from the group for topic ideas for the fall water school. It is set for October 25, 26, and 27 in Bozeman. From the survey results from spring school there is interest in lead and copper, safety, emerging contaminants, lagoons wastewater treatment, asset management, instrumentation and control. It was suggested to have a class on the response to

	<p>the recent flooding and to possibly get some systems on board to help present. Craig said the intention of the school is to fill the gaps that don't exist. Have longer sessions and be more in depth. John suggested lead and copper. Do a half to full day on lead and copper, the inventory of lead service lines, and process optimization.</p> <p>Logan asked if the spring school was record. Craig said it was not. John mentioned the most recent training he attended he got more out of it by being in person than watching online. You are also able to network as well as earn your continuing education credits. Craig said last fall they offered online training simultaneously with the in-person class and it took away from both platforms. In person training is better, easier to track, and you have the opportunity to network. Darryl mentioned that a few years ago at the Billings water school the class was recorded live, and he said it was distracting and takes away from both the event and presenter. Reta mentioned that there was a lot of online training done during covid and it was a learning experience for both the trainers and the operators. Some feedback she's received from the remote/ smaller systems is it's more affordable. Jen said that a lot of the operators like the hands-on training. Craig said they are looking at putting together a lab class for both CECs and review sessions. Greg requested that it not start on a Monday, but rather Tuesday so people don't need to travel on Sunday. Ron asked if Craig was concerned with the prices of hotels in Bozeman for the fall water school? Craig said they will be able to have blocks of rooms available during the school to hopefully keep costs down.</p>
<p><b>ATO Module Training and Miles City Exam Stats for Laboratory</b></p>	<p>Libby reported Reta, Jen, and herself have started a project taking a look at pass/ fail rates of testing to try and get scores to improve. They started with a small laboratory module. Weeks have been spent going through the need-to-know criteria and she redid the lab presentation for the review sessions. She tried it out for the first time at the Miles City Spring School. The scores in the lab section increased from the MRWS conference. The next training module that will be worked on is the treatment module. With the information we have put together, Craig and the ATO office are going to start working on an online training.</p>
<p><b>The Silver Wave . . . a look at operators retiring</b></p>	<p>Jen reported on some operator statistics that she put together. This included the age range of the certified operators. 60% of the certified operators are ages 50 and up. 34% of the operators are 60 and up. The youngest operator is 22 and the oldest is 90. What are some ideas to recruit and keep operators? John said about veterans. They have a hard time to retain operators due to cost of living. Nick commented it's the pay, board, councils, or mayors. They don't understand the importance of operators. You need to educate the type of government they have. Logan said they have had retirements and others leaving for a higher paying contract/ job. You can't necessarily hire people from out of town to come and work for lower wages. They have a hard time re-opening contracts with the union. Craig asked if the certification office notices a drop every year. Reta said they start out with a lot of revokes, but a lot of them are willing to pay the late fee to fix their license. A lot of the older</p>

	<p>operators are still operating systems because they are the owners and they can't afford to pay someone else to operate it. Ron said trying to retain operators and find replacements for retirees has been difficult. They have to fight to keep their people. They are also building a 50-million-dollar wastewater plant and the engineer says they will need 4 fulltime employees to run it. They will need to find talented individuals to run it and are starting to look at housing for them. Craig agreed pay is an issue and a very hard thing to fix in the public sector. Possibly make the entry into the profession easier. Get more people in the door. Ron said to increase awareness. Towns could check with their neighbors or have a database to see what operators are getting paid across the state for different classifications. The board needs to figure it out. John said Bozeman's operations have been down 6 people out of 28 for a long time. It's proactive versus reactive every day. John also said a small part of the problem is that you have to have a certification to get a job and the word is going around about the pass rates. That is a small part about recruiting operators.</p> <p>Nick asked if there was anything new on the class 1C exam. Darryl reported that they got a group together that consisted of permit writers, MRWS representative, wastewater trainers and himself. They all took the test and it's a difficult test. Nick asked wouldn't it be better to give the smaller systems the smaller exams/ simpler exams. Hinsdale for example. Logan said he has had several operators that took the distribution exams and didn't pass, and they are smart guys. It's not working for them. They give them some time to study. John said Bozeman operators get \$8000 a year raises when they pass the exam and it's hard for them to pass. Craig said maybe have a test specific to systems. Not all systems will have disinfection. Libby said all operators and or systems will run into disinfection at some point. Andy said what about breaking it into modules/ stages for the type of exams. For example, the first year take part of it, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, take the next part rather than the entire exam at once. Logan said he couldn't even find anything on the ABC website. Greg stated that the 1C originally was grouped together by Bill Bahr. The next step is to evaluate the Class II ABC exam to see if it's a better match to the 1C systems and then change it. Nick mentioned the smaller systems that are a 1C systems have operators that take and pass the exam after four or five times and then will move on to a bigger system. That's a problem.</p>
<p><b>Update on Operator Renewals and Revokes</b></p>	<p>Reta reported on renewals. She has been getting a lot of payments, CECs submitted. The initial invoices were sent out and then additional ones were sent out to the operators that passed their exams at the MRWS conference, Miles City Spring School, and in office exams. She is currently in the processed of going through wallet cards to make sure people that have paid, have met their CEC requirement. Suspension letters will go out the first part of July. Once those go out, she expects to see more payments come in.</p>
<p><b>Additional Discussion</b></p>	<p>John said he has been on this council for a while and would like to mention that it is a strong council.</p>

<b>Date of next meeting</b>	Jen will send out a meeting poll when we get closer to November to set a meeting up. That seems to work the best. Meeting adjourned.
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