

NewsLeaks

Vermont
Rural Water Association

Spring 2021

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your utility** p.3

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The Vermont Rural Water Association provides training and support to drinking water and wastewater systems to promote healthy communities, rivers, and lakes across Vermont.

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On the cover: This water storage tank at the South Georgia Fire District (**VRWA System Member**) features "Woodland Mural" by artist Jean Cannon of Bellows Falls, Vermont.

Online Content

Did you know we have a blog? We post useful and interesting resources for water and wastewater systems, including:

Cybersecurity — VTruralwater.org/cybersecurity

Information about the recent hack at a Florida water system and ways to protect your utility's digital infrastructure

Water Heroes — VTruralwater.org/water-heroes

Interviews with water and wastewater operators around the state

Classifieds — VTruralwater.org/resources/classifieds

Post and view job openings and equipment for sale

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In the Year of the Ox, Let's be BOLD



by Liz Royer
Executive Director

As I type this, I realize today is the Chinese Lunar New Year. It is the beginning of the Year of the Ox. In many ways, the ox is a good symbol for those in the water and wastewater industry: hardworking and content to operate behind the scenes.

But one thing I learned in 2020 is that we need to start calling attention to ourselves and our essential services. We needed to make agencies and legislators aware of issues that water and wastewater systems were facing during the pandemic, as well as ongoing concerns like the burden of PFAS regulations.

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Over the course of the past year, Vermont Rural Water has been working hard to improve our advocacy and outreach efforts at both the state and federal level. We represented rural water and wastewater systems during our annual Washington, DC fly-in, where we discussed issues and challenges faced by Vermont's utilities with our Congressional offices. At the state level, we testified on behalf of all public water and wastewater systems to legislative committees.

We challenge you to advocate for the needs of your water and wastewater systems.

We were able to secure \$50,000 in state funding for bottled water for schools experiencing Do-Not-Drink orders due to PFAS contamination. We advocated for water and wastewater utilities to be included in the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP) and worked with the Department of Public Service to distribute over \$630,000 for unpaid bills to over 140 water and wastewater utilities.

Through these efforts, we've learned that elected officials prefer to hear about challenges and concerns directly from you—the people operating and managing utilities across the state. While we will continue to advocate for all of you, we are calling on Vermont's water and wastewater personnel to tell their stories.

We challenge you to contact one of your local legislators and invite them for a tour of your facility (virtually, if needed). Tell them what your system is facing and how they could help you protect public health in the communities they serve. It is also important to highlight any financial challenges and tie that to economic development and recovery efforts in the local area.

While most of us prefer to be behind the scenes, this is the year that we need YOU to be proactive with your communications and to advocate for your water and wastewater systems at the state and federal level.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and right now is the time to be squeaky. We encourage you to proactively communicate with your legislators and regulators and to help us make your voices heard on a variety of issues like PFAS, infrastructure funding, vaccine prioritization, and COVID-19 response. 💧

YANKEE INGENUITY



by Wayne Graham
Wastewater Systems Specialist

This column details clever solutions invented by Vermont's water and wastewater professionals. These money-saving, stress-reducing hacks might make life at your second home—the treatment plant—a little bit easier.

Safety First

Sometimes, when complying with safety regulations, engineered solutions are warranted. The Sugarbush Utilities staff (**VRWA System Member**) hired Laramie Water Resources (**VRWA Associate Member**) to do just that. Phil Laramie's crew cored a hole in the concrete pump station wet well and installed a vertically operated valve. This allows the operators to open and close it from ground level and completely avoid having to go into the pump station valve pit. Sugarbush Director of Utilities, Gene Martin, said, "We are mating new equipment with old which can be a challenge, but Phil Laramie is a true craftsman who gets the job done right."



The pump station with a retrofitted valve handle (right) allows for safer operations from ground level.

Ingenuity During a Pandemic

Our water sector operators always step up when things get tough or a disaster happens. In dealing with COVID-19, systems are finding that it's not just a matter of preventing personnel from getting sick; it's also important to keep people separated so that if one person comes into contact with COVID, the whole staff doesn't have to stay home and quarantine. Many facilities have developed strategies to do this, such as:

- Split shifts to keep operators separated
- Have one operator run each satellite plant to maintain isolation
- Have one operator or manager work from home to avoid contact with others. This person can take over operations if the rest of the staff gets sick or needs to quarantine.

The start of the pandemic highlighted the importance of safe drinking water and proper wastewater treatment, and the essential roles operators play in these services. Vermont Rural Water, GMWEA, and VT WARN have been advocating for systems and operators since the State of Emergency was first declared in March 2020. We encouraged Vermont Emergency Management to designate water and wastewater as essential services. The State of Vermont helped by offering flexibility in maintaining our certifications/licenses and training organizations quickly transitioned to online classes. VT WARN has handed out over 10,000 cloth masks from FEMA/EPA to operators. Vermont Rural Water and GMWEA asked the legislature to provide hazard pay to operators and to include water and wastewater bills in the arrearage assistance

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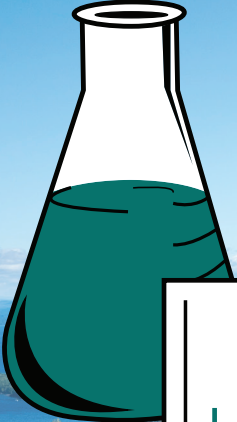
program. Currently we have been trying to get operators moved up on the vaccination priority list. Stay tuned to our emails and VTruralwater.org/covid-19

Waste Not, Want Not

During the most recent upgrade at the Bellows Falls WWTF (**VRWA System Member**), chief operator Rob Wheeler and his crew decided to repurpose the growing pile of discarded equipment. Anyone who has been around anaerobic digesters will recognize the lids of their recycling bin as Varec thief hole sampling covers. They even made use of old valve handles on their kitchenette cabinets and coat racks! Rob's facility is always spotless and runs very smoothly. No wonder he was awarded the GMWEA Wastewater Operator Excellence Award in 2020! 💧



At the facility, you'll sort your bottles and recycleables with help from old sample hole covers (top), open the cabinets with valve handles (bottom right), and hang your coat on a repurposed valve knob (bottom left).



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Training Calendar

Spring 2021

Date	Course	TCHs	Cost (Member/Non)
Thur, April 8 9 am – 12:30 pm	HazCom Compliance	3 W WW	\$18 / \$36
Wed, April 14 9 am – 1:30 pm	Water and Wastewater Ethics	4 W WW	\$24 / \$48
Tue, April 20 9 am – 12:30 pm	Dairy Wastewater Exam Review	3 WW	\$30 / \$60
Wed, April 21 9 am – 12:30 pm	Microbiology of Anaerobic Digesters	3 WW	\$18 / \$36
Thur, April 22 12 pm – 3:30 pm	Anaerobic Digester Biogas Systems and Operational Considerations	3 WW	\$18 / \$36
Wed, April 28 9 am – 12:30 pm	Creating and Updating an Operation and Maintenance Manual	3 W	\$18 / \$36
May 5 & 6 8:30 am – 1:30 pm	Annual Conference	8 W WW	\$48 / \$96
Tue, May 18 9 am – 12:30 pm	Introduction to Surface Water Treatment	3 W	\$18 / \$36
May 19 & 26 9 am – 1:30 pm	Exam Preparation Course (Class 3/4/D)	8 W	\$48 / \$96
June 2 & 3 9 am – 12:30 pm	VOSHA Safety Training	6 W WW	\$36 / \$72
Thur, June 3 9 am – 12:30 pm	Basic Math for Water and Wastewater Operators	3 W WW	\$18 / \$36
Tue, June 8 9 am – 12:30 pm	Advanced Math for Water and Wastewater Operators	3 W WW	\$18 / \$36
Thur, June 17 9 am – 12:30 pm	Got Asbestos Pipe?	3 W WW	\$18 / \$36
Wed, June 23 9 am – 1:30 pm	Water and Wastewater Ethics	4 W WW	\$24 / \$48
TCH = Training Contact Hours W = Approved for Water Credit WW = Approved for Wastewater Credit			

COVID-19 Notes

All classes will continue to be online through Zoom. Find information about using Zoom on our website. We will follow guidance from the State of Vermont regarding the return to in-person trainings.

DWGPD and OPR are accepting online trainings for TCHs for operator certification. Attendees will receive a certificate of TCHs by email after class.

Water operator classes 3, 4, and distribution certification exams will be offered online starting in 2021. The Wastewater Program is offering paper exams in addition to the normal online exams. Watch for an announcement or check the OPR website for information about the paper exam.

Registration and Payments

Register online at VTruralwater.org/training to pay by credit card or check. You can also register by mailing in the form below with a check. Please register early; registrations received less than 24 hours prior to class are subject to a \$20 late fee.

Members receive a 50% discount on registration fees for all employees.

Cancellations/Refunds

Cancellations received at least 24 hours in advance can receive a refund or transfer to another class. No-shows will be charged the full course fee.

Accommodations

We strive to make our classes accessible to all. To discuss concerns or request accommodations, call 802-660-4988 or email info@vtruralwater.org

Register Online: VTruralwater.org/training

Registration Form

Duplicate this form to register for multiple classes.

Course and Date: _____

Attendee Name(s): _____

System/Organization: _____

Billing Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____
(number where you can be reached the morning of class)

Payment Enclosed: _____

Mail this form and payment to:

VRWA
20 Susie Wilson Rd, Suite B
Essex Junction, VT 05452

Questions?

info@vtruralwater.org
(802) 660-4988

Vermont Rural Water's Conference is Coming!



by Matt Guerino
Training Coordinator

Vermont Rural Water's Annual Conference is in May, but for us preparation starts in January. Last March, all of those hours planning were put on hold when the COVID-19 pandemic began. This year, we've put even more time into figuring out how to hold our first-ever virtual conference.

First off, our conference is going to be held on May 5 and 6. In those two days you can earn 8 TCHs for water and wastewater (stay tuned for some exciting courses). We will have some time for sponsors to say hi and let you know what they have been doing the last year.

The classes will be live on Zoom starting at 8:30 am each day. At the beginning of each session, like any of our regular Zoom classes, we will ask that you sign your name in to the chat menu. This is how we track attendance and award TCHs.

What will be different than regular classes is that instead of being emailed a Zoom link, when you register you will be emailed an access code. You can use this code to open the Conference webpage. Here you will find the Zoom link to every conference class. I would suggest you take a look at our conference sponsors as well. Without our sponsors we wouldn't be able to have the conference.

We're also going to have our Awards Ceremony and Membership Meeting on Thursday. The Awards Ceremony will be especially exciting because we have two Tony Torchia Awards to present. Last year's winner still hasn't received their award!

Everyone at Vermont Rural Water is excited to see you at our conference. Although we can't all be together right now and some of you won't be able to make fun of my golf swing, I think you will still get a lot out of our conference. Thank you all for the continued support and we look forward to seeing you soon. 💧

Annual Conference

May 5-6, 2021
on Zoom

\$48 member / \$96 non-member
Registration opening soon
VTruralwater.org/conference

Presented by:



Annual Membership Meeting & Awards Ceremony

May 6, 12:30 pm
on Zoom

Interested in sponsoring our
conference?

Email info@vtruralwater.org
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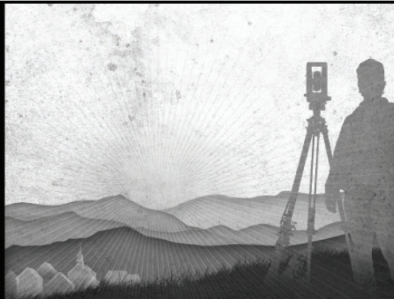


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Apprenticeship Update

Registered Apprentice Program Full, Spots Available for Small Systems

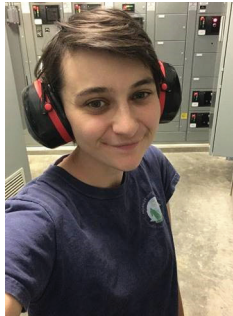


by Paula Jackson
Apprenticeship Program Coordinator

The second year of our apprenticeship program is off to a strong start. Eight registered apprentices are now working at municipal water and wastewater facilities, including Richmond, Burlington, South Burlington, Springfield, and Brattleboro.

There are still spaces available in the small system apprenticeship program. This one-year program is structured to help smaller water and wastewater systems train new hires. The apprentices will receive on-the-job training and classroom education to prepare them to take the Class 2 Water Treatment Exam or Level 1-2 Wastewater Certification Exam.

Unlike apprenticeships at larger municipal systems, which must follow the requirements of the Vermont Department of Labor, small system apprenticeships have flexibility to tailor the position to suit the needs of the system. Apprentices



Amelia McClure (left) and Tyler Booska (right) are apprentices at the City of Burlington.

Read an interview with Amelia about her job as an apprentice at VTruralwater.org/water-heroes-amelia-mcclure

es can work full- or part-time and there is no set requirement for the number of formal training hours.

At the system, the apprentice will be working under a mentor who will provide on-the-job training.

The type and amount of formal instruction the apprentice receives will be tailored to the needs of the system. Class options include the Small Systems Class 2 Water Operator Certification Course or Basic Wastewater Course and other classes offered by Vermont

Rural Water, as well as self-study courses. All apprentices will receive OSHA safety training.

The goal of the program is to equip apprentices with the skills to operate and maintain the system and the knowledge to take the exam and become licensed/certified operators.

If your system is interested in participating in the small system apprenticeship program, please contact me at 802-343-1356 or pjackson@vtruralwater.org. 💧



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A Salute to Water Operators during a Difficult Year



by Aaron Perez
Water System Specialist

When COVID-19 swept across the country, lives were put on hold. Schools and businesses closed. Restaurants, stores, and places of worship emptied. Yet water operators never stopped working. You are essential workers whose services are critical during this public health crisis. Water operators in the small towns of Vermont have been nimble and flexible in meeting the ever-evolving needs of your communities. Your commitment to be innovators with a depth of skill and capability remains strong. You have renewed your focus for managing your water system programs during these unprecedented times.

I've witnessed incredible flexibility from water operators in relation to project management. Some work



Aaron Perez performs leak detection in Castleton last spring. Our field staff have continued providing technical assistance to water systems while following COVID-19 safety protocols.

has been put on hold while only projects deemed essential or where safe distancing was possible were able to proceed. You've been prepared to switch gears and reallocate resources when needed.

Additionally, many operators have been on the frontline of managing financial strain. The loss of revenue from water billing has been a common and understandable effect of the crisis. Already, some municipalities are reporting significant

revenue reductions. And you've been right there, on the frontline, scoping out and managing the budget to keep the water flowing despite the lack of funds.

Water operators have risen to excellence over the past year. All you've accomplished deserves a virtual, contactless pat on the back.

Many water operators have been severely tested, as you've grappled with communication in the COVID era. Yet, I've seen you overcome these challenges and become savvy with video conferencing technology to keep the lines of communication open with townspeople, select boards, and contractors, and to fulfill your continuing education requirements.

Water operators across the state of Vermont have risen to excellence in every pursuit over the past year. All you've accomplished deserves a virtual, contactless pat on the back. I offer my gratitude to you for balancing your responsibilities as parents, remote learning teachers, and above all, your tireless efforts to keep your systems running. 💧

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