NewsLeaks

Vermont Rural Water Association

Summer 2021

Does your system need infrastructure funding? p.3

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

Staff

Executive Director
Liz Royer, lroyer@vtruralwater.org

Water Systems Specialists
Paul Sestito, psestito@vtruralwater.org
Aaron Perez, aperez@vtruralwater.org
Tim Russo, trusso@vtruralwater.org

Wastewater Systems Specialists
Wayne Graham, wgraham@vtruralwater.org
Elizabeth Walker, ewalker@vtruralwater.org

Training Coordinator
Matt Guerino, mguerino@vtruralwater.org

Source Protection Specialist
Diana Butler, dbutler@vtruralwater.org

Apprenticeship Program Coordinator
Paula Jackson, pjackson@vtruralwater.org

Director of Finance and Administration
Cheryl Lynn, clynn@vtruralwater.org

Program Assistant
Katherine Boyk, kboyk@vtruralwater.org

Board

Contact

802-660-4988
info@vtruralwater.org
VTruralwater.org
20 Susie Wilson Road, Suite B
Essex Junction, VT 05452-2827

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On the cover: Lake Memphremagog as seen from Newport, VT

Infrastructure Funding Updates and New Action Items

by Liz Royer
Executive Director

Does your utility have aging infrastructure? Are you in need of funding for maintenance or upgrades? State and local governments are starting to receive allocations from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that can be used for water and sewer infrastructure projects. (See our Op-Ed on page 3.)

Now is the time to reach out to ask for ARPA funds. Find ideas to get you started at VTruralwater.org/infrastructure-funding

Thank you to everyone who had reached out to their legislators and contacted local media outlets over the past few months. We appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedules to assist us with advocating for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure funding. Our outreach and education efforts are working, but there is still more to do.

We recommend systems continue to reach out to town officials, legislators, and local reporters to educate them about who you are, what you do, and why it is essential. Municipal employees and local elected officials should be included in this conversation because it is crucial that they are aware of the water and wastewater infrastructure needs, whether it's a town-owned system or a fire district.

We have heard that legislators have responded to communications with water and wastewater systems by suggesting other funding sources. Here are a few suggestions about how you can keep the conversation going:

1. If they say that they are already allocating $115 million of the American Rescue Plan Act state funding towards water infrastructure, you should point out most of that money is proposed for building new water, wastewater and stormwater projects. Talk about the funding you need to maintain and improve your existing infrastructure.

2. If they suggest using State Revolving Funds (SRFs), remind them that SRFs are a source of financing, not funding. The SRFs work for some projects at some systems, but some infrastructure projects aren't eligible and some systems aren't able to take out debt. Many smaller systems don't have the customer base and rates are already maxed out due to other loans and projects.

3. If they want to wait for the Federal infrastructure bill (American Jobs Plan/Build Back Better), respond by saying that there are still too many unknowns to make any decisions based on this proposal. While the American Rescue Plan Act money is already starting to be distributed, any additional federal infrastructure funding is tied up in Congress. At this point, there isn't a conceptual proposal that looks like it can become a bipartisan package. Rumors are that any water or sewer infrastructure money may go through the SRFs, which might not address the current needs.

Now is the time to advocate for this funding. If we don't plead the case for water and wastewater systems, other sectors (such as broadband, transportation, or recreation) will step in and take advantage of ARPA funds. We need our local and state officials on our side, and we need to work together to educate them and let them know that out of sight is not out of mind when it comes to infrastructure. We need your continued help to plead the case that our existing water and wastewater infrastructure has been ignored for too long and should be a priority for the public health and environmental protection of all of our communities.

Ways to Boost Support

- Invite legislators, town officials, and local reporters to a board meeting
- Take them on a tour of your facilities and distribution/collection system
- Provide a list of your infrastructure needs over the next 5-10 years, with anticipated costs
- Pitch a story to the local newspaper about infrastructure projects
- Emphasize how you protect the environment, maintain public health, and allow for economic development in your community
- Reiterate that we are essential workers who are maintaining critical infrastructure 24/7

Now is the time to prioritize water, sewer infrastructure

The following was published in VT Digger's commentary section on April 21.

Over the last year, you may have worried about your job, about your children's education, about putting food on the table and finding toilet paper. But did you ever worry about turning on the faucet or flushing the toilet? You didn't have to, because Vermont's water and wastewater utilities continued providing safe drinking water and treating wastes.

And now we have the opportunity to invest in the state's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. The American Rescue Plan Act will provide $1 billion to the state of Vermont plus $198 million to cities and towns. This is funding that can be used to protect public health, strengthen local economies, and preserve the environment through investments in water and sewer infrastructure.

Drinking water utilities began being established in Vermont in the late 1800s, and it is not uncommon for communities to still be using water lines that are 100 years or older. Deteriorating infrastructure is expensive to maintain and can cause contamination concerns—especially when components are made of lead. Due to budget constraints, many water and wastewater systems have taken a piecemeal approach to maintenance, replacing individual components as they break. And due to the pandemic, all but the most vital maintenance has been deferred during the last year.

Just like our nation's highways and bridges, our water and sewer infrastructure, most of which is buried and out of sight, have outlived their life expectancy and are in desperate need of an overhaul. The Green Mountain Water Environment Association estimates that water utilities will require $350 million to address immediate infrastructure and water quality challenges over the next three years.

The most recent Vermont Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers gave our state's wastewater infrastructure a D+, while drinking water received a C-. That translates to somewhere between poor and mediocre. For a state that prides itself on our protecting our environment and supporting our local communities, this is unacceptable.

How important is modern water infrastructure? Ask the people of Texas how they fared without drinking water during the Valentine's Day winter storm. Ask the residents of Flint, Michigan how they felt upon learning that their families had been drinking lead-contaminated water for years. Ask yourself whether you want this to happen in Vermont.

The American Rescue Plan funds provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernize water and sewer infrastructure at no cost to Vermonters. Governor Scott's proposed allocation of these funds, released April 6, does include $170 million for clean water. The majority of this money, however, is designated for new projects rather than upgrading existing infrastructure. This proposal will not help meet the current needs of our drinking water and sewer utilities.

There is the possibility that the Build Back Better bill, President Biden's infrastructure plan, could provide funds for water and sewer upgrades. But as there are many unknowns about this bill—including whether Congress will pass it—Vermont would be wise to strategically invest the funding we have now in the places it is needed most.

Improved water services will provide the foundation for communities' economic recovery, for revitalizing downtowns and developing affordable housing, and for protecting the environment. Studies have shown that every dollar spent on water quality infrastructure returns $2.95 dollars to the local economy. Using American Rescue Plan funds for this work means that water rates won't increase and add additional burden to low-income Vermonters. We have the opportunity now to safeguard the state's most vulnerable populations while protecting public health for all.

Have you completed your AWIA Risk and Resilience Assessment?

by Tim Russo
Water System Specialist

Community water systems that serve more than 3,300 people are required to complete a risk assessment and develop an emergency response plan under Section 2013 of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA).

The Risk and Resilience Assessment must be completed (and certification submitted to EPA) by June 30, 2021. If you haven't completed yours yet, we might be able to help!

EPA offers a number of tools to assist in the completion of these assessments, which can be found at www.epa.gov/waterresilience/awia-section-2013

Start with the Small System Risk and Resilience Assessment Checklist, which you will find under Assistance Resources. Don't be intimated by the length of this document! While it may appear overwhelming, there is an inherent redundancy that you will no doubt recognize as you work your way through the first few pages. For example, if tornadoes do not pose a significant threat to your water storage tank, they will not likely pose a threat to any other asset.

I would strongly suggest that you devote the majority of your time to assessing cybersecurity vulnerabilities. (See "Cybersecurity," page 14.)

Who should have an Emergency Response Plan?

AWIA applies to community water systems serving more than 3,300 people. While wastewater systems and very small water systems serving fewer than 3,300 are not required to perform a Risk Assessment and create an Emergency Response Plan, these steps are still strongly encouraged. **Any utility is potentially vulnerable to natural hazards or malevolent acts, and the best way to prevent major damage and service disruption is to be prepared.**

Staff at Vermont Rural Water would be glad to sit down and go through the assessment and planning process with anyone interested.

What emergencies should a water system plan for?

EPA's Risk and Resilience Assessment looks at potential **natural hazards** and **malevolent acts** and how they may impact:

- Treatment processes
- Operation and maintenance
- Chemical storage
- Source water and intake
- Storage and distribution
- Monitoring practices
- Financial systems
- Physical security
- Electronic/computer systems

It's not enough to assume no vulnerabilities exist simply because you "have an IT guy". You should discuss security with IT, certainly, but also consider ALL aspects of system security including SCADA, billing systems, remote access, and ALL staff who use them.

Once you have completed the assessment, you must certify this with EPA. They do not want a copy of the assessment, only your certification that it's been completed. It was previously understood that after certifying the completion of the risk assessment, you would have 6 months to complete an Emergency Response Plan. **We very recently received some clarification from EPA: they will NOT be looking for ERPs until after 12/31/2021. Systems are encouraged to certify their risk assessments as soon as possible rather than wait for the June 30 deadline.**

The EPA website listed above has resources including a fact sheet and template to help with your Emergency Response Plan.

If you need direct, onsite assistance, let us know by emailing info@vtruralwater.org. We will do our best to schedule a site visit and go through the Risk and Resilience Assessment Checklist with you.

Working Together for Source Protection

by Diana Butler
Source Water Specialist

Protecting a drinking water source takes collaboration, and community support is vital for success. Drinking water systems generally cannot do it alone. In the Town of Putney, Vermont, the community has come together to not only protect their drinking water source but also provide wildlife habitat and promote outdoor education.

The Putney Water System (**VRWA System Member**) went on line in 2004 to serve the village area and Landmark College. Establishing the public system was critical as many private wells in the village experienced low yields and some had been contaminated by failed underground storage tanks. The water source is a gravel well located north of the village area. The Source Protection Area (SPA) covers approximately 198 acres of wetlands and town-owned forest.

The town purchased 26 acres of wetland in 2012 to protect the drinking water SPA, maintain flood plain protection, and protect wildlife habitat near the village center. The land was purchased with funds from the Putney Water Commission as well as donations from residents, foundations, and local businesses.

This area is now the Wilson Wetland Preserve and is managed by the Putney Conservation Commission. The town collaborates with the Conservation Commission to promote and implement the Wilson Wetland management plan.

"Working in partnership allows our resource area to thrive in its minimal disturbance," said Karen Astely, Putney Town Manager. "The ability to maintain the integrity is multi-faceted within this natural area. It requires communication, collaboration, planning, and forecasting the potential unknowns as well as the ability to control what we can."

Protecting the wetlands directly improves the quality and quantity of the drinking water source well. The Conservation Committee created the Wilson Wetland Stewardship Committee to construct a land management plan for the wetland. This plan outlines recommendations to maintain the ecological health of the wetland and details the relationship between the aquifer of the Putney Water System source well and the wetlands. The Conservation Committee continues to actively search for research opportunities to further explore the relationship between the wetland, aquifers, and the source well.

The Putney Central School Forest trails allow access to the wetlands for recreational and educational opportunities. Public access and community involvement has been essential to this success. "The fact is people genuinely care about this resource. As long as we continue to work together to minimize concerns that may potentially impact the balance, this area can and will remain a sustainable water source area," said Astely.

Training Calendar

Summer 2021

Date	Course	TCHs	Cost (Member/Non)
July 14 – 22 9 am – 2:00 pm	Small Systems Class 2 Water Operator Certification Course	16 **W**	$96 / $192 Textbook sold separately
Tue, July 27 9 am – 12:30 pm	Metering in the 21st Century	3 **W**	$18 / $36
Wed, July 28 9 am – 1:30 pm	Basic Math for Water and Wastewater Operators	4 **W WW**	$24 / $48
Tue, Aug 10 9 am – 1:30 pm	Basic Math for Water and Wastewater Operators	4 **W WW**	$24 / $48
Tue, Aug 17 9 am – 12:30 pm	Introduction to Surface Water Treatment	3 **W**	$18 / $36
Thur, Aug 19 10 am – 1:30 pm	Metering in the 21st Century	3 **W**	$18 / $36
Sept 8 – Oct 21 9 am – 1:30 pm	Advanced Class 3 & 4 Water Operator Certification Course	48 **W**	$215 / $420 Textbooks sold separately
Sept 8 – Oct 7 9 am – 1:30 pm	Distribution Operator Certification Course	32 **W**	$145 / $285 Textbooks sold separately
Thur, Sept 9 9 am – 1:30 pm	Discharges from Breweries and Food Industries to Your WWTF	4 **WW**	$24 / $48
Oct 5 – 26 9 am – 2:00 pm	Small Systems Class 2 Water Operator Certification Course *Anticipated location: Essex Junction with virtual/hybrid option*	16 **W**	$96 / $192 Textbook sold separately

TCH = Training Contact Hours **W** = Approved for Water Credit **WW** = Approved for Wastewater Credit

Register Online: VTruralwater.org/training

COVID-19 Notes

All classes will continue to be online through Zoom at least through summer 2021. Find information about using Zoom on our website.

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

Certification exams for Class 2, 3, 4, and Distribution operators are now being offered online. Find more information and register for the exam at dec.vermont.gov/water/drinking-water/pwso/operator-exams

The Wastewater Program is currently offering exams online. The paper exam is anticipated to be offered in the fall or early winter. Watch for an announcement or check the OPR website.

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 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

Thanks for joining us at our 2021 Conference!

Thank you to the attendees, sponsors, and presenters who made our 2021 conference a success! We heard from a variety of experts on topics including cybersecurity, emergency response planning, PFAS sampling, crisis communications, COVID-19 in wastewater, and regulatory updates from DEC. Over 110 people attended the 12 training sessions.

At our Member Meeting, we presented our annual report and announced the results of the board of directors elections. Congratulations to Rod Lamothe, Margaret Dwyer, and Jon Thornton who

each will serve another three-year term on our board.

The winner of the 2021 Tony Torchia Award is Marcel Mayhew. Marcel has worked over 30 years at the water and wastewater facilities in North Troy. "This is what I do for a living, and getting this award is beyond what I could imagine," he said. Congratulations, Marcel!

Marcel Mayhew received the Tony Torchia Award for outstanding contribution to the water and wastewater field.

Updating Vermont's Wastewater Laboratory Manual

by Elizabeth Walker
Wastewater Specialist

Not a day goes by without testing of the influent, effluent, and points in between at wastewater facilities across Vermont. Testing may be used for process control, permit compliance purposes, or both. Facilities perform different amounts of testing depending on the complexity of their treatment processes and their permit requirements. Regardless, it is important for all facilities to follow proper sample collection and testing procedures, safety protocols, and quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) guidance.

With that said I am very excited to share that Vermont Rural Water will be contracting with Andrew D. Fish, of Laboratory Excellence LLC, to update the 1996 Vermont Laboratory Manual for Wastewater Analysis. This manual is outdated in many respects but still contains some pertinent information. Thank you to the Wastewater Management Program for seeing that this project was approved. The project will be done with assistance and oversight from Amy Polaczyk and John Merrifield.

The 1996 manual used the 18th edition of the Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater. This new manual will be using the most recent version, the 23rd edition.

The updated lab manual is scheduled for completion by the end of July. The final product will be available for free on the Wastewater Management Program webpage.

If any of you who work regularly in a lab at your facility want to provide feedback or suggestions for the updated manual, please feel free to contact me at ewalker@vtruralwater.org or 802-917-3570. Your input is very helpful.

Some Tips for Proper Laboratory Procedures

- Use proper PPE and follow good hygiene practices to protect yourself from diseases that may be contracted through improper handling of samples.
- Understand the effects of various reagents to maintain a safe work environment in the laboratory.
- Keep up-to-date copies of Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and review them regularly.
- Use the proper sampling container for the procedure to ensure accuracy of the results.
- Have a written QA/QC manual that clearly and concisely outlines procedures to ensure accurate results. Regularly update this manual share it with everyone who does sampling and testing at your facility.
- Find a QA/QC reference document at https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/wastewater/wastewater-laboratory-assistance
- For assistance with creating or updating a wastewater laboratory QA/QC manual, please feel free to contact Wayne Graham or myself.

Survey Says!

Customer Satisfaction Surveys for Water Systems

by Paul Sestito
Water System Specialist

Why should a water system conduct customer satisfaction surveys? A survey is a form of public relations and communication, which is important for any utility or business. Customers who feel engaged in the operations of the utility might be more supportive when it comes time for a bond vote or rate increase. And results of the survey could potentially alert you to issues in the distribution system.

Recently I was asked by a water system if there were any examples of surveys to send to customers. I couldn't think of any that I had seen, so I scoured the internet. Surprisingly, although there were some examples of customer surveys, there were not as many as I thought or hoped there would be. So I compiled a list of considerations and example survey questions based on what I had found and my experiences working with water systems.

The first step is to determine the purpose of the survey and how the utility will use and respond to the information gathered. Who do you want to survey—all customers or one particular service area or demographic? What type of information do you want to gather? You may be interested in topics like water quality, distribution, billing, water conservation, or customer service. Does your utility have the capacity to respond to the feedback you receive?

Next decide how to distribute the survey. Options include mail, email, phone, door-to-door, or at a public event like a fair or farmer's market. Also consider how you will compile survey results, which is more time-consuming with paper surveys than online.

Most importantly, be sure you are prepared as a system to address issues brought to light as a result of the survey. If problems are identified, and the system does nothing to address the issues, you risk losing customer confidence and trust.

A few example survey questions are on the next page. For my full list of questions, visit vtruralwater.org/customer-surveys

If you decide that a survey may be a good idea for your system, please feel free to use and edit these questions to meet your needs.

Customer feedback is a great way to gain information about your water system. Surveys do not have to be long or complicated, and even one or two feedback questions in a bill/mailer or on your website can help gain valuable information.

Example Survey Questions

Do you drink your tap water?

YES NO

COMMENTS:

Do you have concerns regarding the safety of your drinking water?

YES NO

COMMENTS:

How would you rate the water quality for the following:

Taste? EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

Odor? EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

Color? EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

Have you ever experienced a disruption in water service?

YES NO

Do you know how to contact the water department if you have a concern about your water service or quality?

YES NO

How concerned are you about water conservation?

VERY SOMEWHAT NOT AT ALL

COMMENTS:

Do you understand the information on your water bill?

YES NO

Do you support rate increases that are needed to continue to maintain/upgrade the water system?

YES NO

What is your preferred method of receiving information about your water?

MAIL EMAIL TEXT PHONE

Cybersecurity is Critical for Water and Wastewater Systems

by Katherine Boyk
Program Assistant

In February, a hacker gained access to the SCADA system at a water treatment facility in Florida and attempted to increase the amount of sodium hydroxide in the water treatment process. An operator noticed the attack and was able to prevent any damage. Last fall, a cyberattack at the University of Vermont Medical Center interrupted operations for months.

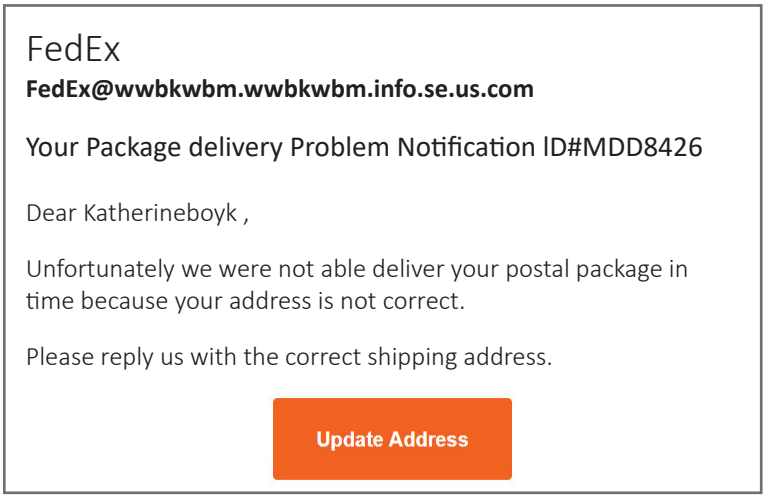
These events show that even at water and wastewater systems, even in Vermont, we are vulnerable to cyber threats. It is important to be alert and take precautions to protect your digital infrastructure.

WHAT IS CYBERSECURITY?

Cybersecurity means guarding your computer systems and the data stored in them from unauthorized access. It is a criminal offense to break into (or "hack") a computer or network. But that doesn't stop bad actors from doing it.

The types of cyberattacks that pose the most likely threat to water and wastewater systems are ransomware and phishing.

Ransomware is a malicious software (or "malware") that is designed to block you from using your computer system or accessing your data until a ransom is paid. This could potentially shut down operations at your system. A computer can become infected with ransomware if you click a malicious internet link or email attachment. The criminal gains access to your system and data and is hoping to receive a ransom payment. Know that paying the ransom does not guarantee that you will get your computer system or data back. Ransomware was used in the cyberattacks on the Colonial oil pipeline in May and the UVM Medical Center last fall.


FedEx
FedEx@wwbkwbm.wwbkwbm.info.se.us.com

Your Package delivery Problem Notification ID#MDD8426

Dear Katherineboyk ,

Unfortunately we were not able deliver your postal package in time because your address is not correct.

Please reply us with the correct shipping address.

Update Address

An example of a phishing email I received recently. Note the typos and suspicious email address; these are clues that this is a fake email.

Phishing is an attempt to gain sensitive information or payment through a fake email that is designed to look real. The email poses as a trustworthy source to try to get you to send personal information, passwords, or money, or trick you into clicking a malicious link or attachment (see the example above). Phishing can also take the form of a text message. If an employee falls victim to a phishing attack, that puts the whole organization at risk. It could compromise your system's data or customer information, and allow the criminal to pose as you in future phishing scams.

Potential damage caused by a cyberattack to a water or wastewater system includes lost productivity, operational disruption, the cost of ransom, the cost of repairing or installing new computer systems, theft of customer data, danger to public health or the environment, and loss of customer confidence.

There are also unintentional cyber incidents, such as if a cable to your building is accidentally cut, leaving utility without internet connection for an extended time. This can cause disruptions to your operations.

CURRENT THREAT ANALYSIS

On May 20, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence released an assessment stating that cyberattacks against water and wastewater systems are

expected to increase in the US and globally.

The assessment said that a cyber criminal may have the goal of receiving ransom payment or may be targeting the water sector in the context of a social/political conflict.

In addition, the Secretary of Homeland Security has issued a bulletin on the heightened threat of domestic terrorism in the United States. It does not mention threats specific to water or wastewater systems, but it is still a good idea to review your utility's physical security and Emergency Response Plan. The bulletin is in effect through August 13.

Ted Gangsei is an intelligence officer for DHS in Vermont. He monitors and evaluates threats to systems nationally. "If threats to Vermont water and wastewater systems are identified, we will provide as much detail on the threat to enhance your physical and cyber security efforts," he said.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

It can seem overwhelming for a water or wastewater system to implement cybersecurity. A small system is not likely to have an IT expert. The good news is there are some steps you can take on your own to protect your computer system, like learning to spot phishing (see "Steps," right). For the more complicated aspects, we encourage you to contact the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) for free assistance.

CISA is a branch of the Department of Homeland Security that assists the nation's critical infrastructure with physical and cyber security. Ron Ford is the cybersecurity advisor for northern New England and spoke at our conference last month. He can perform an assessment of your system and advise you on steps you can take to improve your cybersecurity. These services are free, voluntary, and non-regulatory. In the event of a cyberattack, CISA can provide assistance. Find more information at www.cisa.gov/region-1

Steps You Can Take Now

- Use long, random passwords and multi-factor authentication
- Learn how to identify a phishing email
- Keep devices and software programs updated to the latest version
- Train all staff on cybersecurity practices
- Ensure your system's physical security prevents unauthorized access to computers and devices
- Include cyberattacks in your system's Emergency Response Plan
- Contact CISA to schedule a free cybersecurity assessment
- Report suspicious activity of any kind to the Vermont Intelligence Center at 844-848-8477
- If your system is under attack, call 911 or CISA's 24/7 report line at 888-282-0870

Find more information and resources at VTruralwater.org/cybersecurity

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Rural Water Association
20 Susie Wilson Road, Suite B
Essex Junction, VT 05452-2827

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