



Rural Water Strong
By: Roger Noe, IRWA Deputy Director

September 2024
Newsletter

Water Matters

We have been sending emails and our staff have been asking for water system personnel to take the Rural Water Strong Pledge. This is the press release from National Rural Water Association for reason for everyone to take the pledge.

“America has 49,397 community water systems, most of which are small. Small and rural communities lack economies of scale. Passing the costs of unfunded mandates onto customers is not feasible without assistance from USDA Rural Development. USDA Rural Development Water and Environmental Programs has consistently supported rural communities in completing necessary upgrades to their water and wastewater facilities. In 2023, USDA RD WEP funded over \$1.7 billion in projects to small and rural communities. The average median household income for communities that received WEP funding was \$37,029, half of the national average household income of \$74,580.

In 2023, 308 WEP projects addressed health and sanitary challenges, and 28,326 new connections provided drinking water to residents for the first time, resulting in over 400,000 individuals and households benefiting from this funding. Today’s Congressional policies and funding decisions are jeopardizing communities in rural America. Budget cuts will leave USDA WEP unable to accomplish its mission. WEP is instrumental in helping rural America increase economic opportunities, protect public health, maintain affordable water access, and ensure their communities are sustainable. **Rural Development** will continue to play a **vital role** in modernizing, preserving, and protecting rural America’s infrastructure and public health. **You can help** secure its future today by signing the pledge and writing to your Congressional representatives today. Providing adequate support and resources necessary to protect and enhance the environment, **public health, sustainability** of utilities, and **economic vitality** of rural America with clean, **affordable**, and **safe water** service is a primary responsibility for our federal elected officials.”

Water is a vital resource and is a requirement for the daily life of drinking water, washing, and flushing. To protect public health everyone should have access to safe drinking water through reliable infrastructure. Rural American deserves safe drinking water just as much as metropolitan residents. There are over 9.8 million students and 1,810 hospitals in rural America. Public health would be jeopardized without safe drinking water and clean wastewater treatment. New regulations like PFAS and copper and lead rules result in costly operational and infrastructure improvements. USDA would be able to assist with funding with these potential upgrades.

While affordable financing is a vital component for these communities, it is not the complete solution. Once these projects are finished the need for training for water and wastewater operator does not go away. Technical assistance is needed for small and rural communities to remain sustainable. Technical assistance includes providing training, environmental compliance, certification, financial management, and on-site support to ensure small and rural systems operate at the highest level.

There are nearly 45,000 water systems in rural America; they are anchors for their communities. Infrastructure including adequate water service is a requirement for a healthy economy and encourages employment opportunities. USDA not only provides essential services for families that live in rural America, but also businesses. These include small businesses, farming, emergency services, and manufacturing. In American nearly 85% of businesses establishments are small and critical for local economies. Affordability is the key factor for small and rural communities to decide to upgrade and enhance their service to their customers. The excessive cost of construction, materials, disrupted services, and increasing regulatory requirements are issues rural America faces when financing critical infrastructure. The Rural Development Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program is a lifeline for Rural America. Grants can be up to 75% of total development cost for most vulnerable communities. For most small rural Americans, a grant with a loan is critical to keep projects affordable.

How can you help? All system personnel, mayors, board councils can take the pledge. Go to our website ilrwa.org scroll to the bottom and click on RURAL WATER STRONG. Then click TAKE THE PLEDGE. The pledge will take less than 1 minute to complete. The questions asked are name, email address, name of utility, population served, sectors of utilities, has system applied for USDA loan, zip code, and then click submit.

Another way to help is to write a letter to your legislators about the importance of the USDA grant and finance program. You can find your representative on our website. Click resources, then click legislative, and then click who is my rep. Your assistance is needed to keep these important funding options and services for your small rural America systems. **“RURAL WATER STRONG.”**

Continually Filling the Skills Gap through Teaching, Training and Learning

By: Jeff Tumati, IRWA Apprenticeship Coordinator

I am incredibly happy to continually provide you with current updates about the apprenticeship training program both through the National Rural Water Association, and locally with Illinois Rural Water Association (IRWA).

In regard to the status of the program nationwide, as of June 30th, there were thirty-six state rural water association affiliates with active programs and three currently in development. This includes six hundred and twenty-nine active apprentices, with two hundred and sixty-seven graduates, working for five hundred thirty-eight participating employers.

IRWA currently has thirty-seven active apprentices. Twenty-four are participating in the water program, and thirteen in the wastewater program. We have an ever-expanding pool of eligible applicants. Currently, thirty-two people are waiting for the opportunity to enter the Water/Wastewater industry and someday become Operations Specialists. The program continues to grow, adding critically needed operators into the work force, which is making a difference in our industry.

I wanted to let everyone know about another recent historic and exciting announcement. The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) recently announced a significant funding breakthrough for the Apprenticeship Program with \$13.1 million in new federal investments. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has allocated \$5.5 million for NRWA's Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program, while the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has awarded \$7.6 million to support the development and expansion of NRWA's vital water industry Registered Apprenticeships. The NRWA Apprenticeship Program has been a top priority for rural America for many years, and these federal funds are

the first competitive grant awards ever dedicated to this important effort. They come at a crucial time to address the urgent need for a trained water and wastewater operator workforce. The EPA's announcement on July 11, 2024, highlights a total of \$20 million in funding for water workforce training and career development, a part of their Investing in America agenda. Similarly, the DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), has prioritized the inclusion of the water and wastewater sector in its Apprenticeship Building America, round 2 funding awards for the first time.

The NRWA Apprenticeship Program is the first nationally recognized Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship program for water and wastewater system operators. It was designed to meet the increasing demands of the industry's workforce. With the projected departure of up to 50% of the current workforce within the next decade, this program is critical for maintaining public health and ensuring the continued delivery of clean and safe water.

This new federal funding will support job opportunities at the local level, establish systematic training methods in the field and the classroom, improve water worker participation, compensation, and retention, and modernize the water industry's approach to workforce development.

Illinois Rural Water Association is very proud to be able to offer the two-year structured Apprenticeship Learning Program as one of our many member services. To learn more about the Apprenticeship Program or any of our other programs and services, please visit our website at www.ilrwa.org.



IRWA Support Letters Are Needed

IRWA employees are dedicated in helping the water and wastewater systems throughout the state in making onsite visits and providing technical assistance in helping to ensure your systems have safe and quality water. Please take a moment to thank any or all of the IRWA employees who have helped your system by writing an appreciation letter on your letterhead and mail to:

Illinois Rural Water Association
P.O. Box 49
Taylorville, IL 62568

CDX (Central Data Exchange), NetDMR, and the Transition to Login.gov

By: Kent Cox, IRWA Clean Water Act Training & Technical Assistance

Many of you, like me, currently use the <https://cdx.epa.gov/> portal to submit your monthly Discharge Monitoring Reports for your wastewater systems. What ever happened to the good ole days when we received a packet of pre-printed DMRs in the mail and used a typewriter to fill in the boxes then sent them monthly via snail mail? Okay, maybe I'm dating myself. I don't usually think of myself as old, that is until Evan Jones or some of the newer operators remind me of when (or if) they were born versus when I started as a maintenance man in a sewer plant early in 1992. I had the somewhat disheartening realization the other day that next year will be my 40th year class reunion. High school couldn't have been that long ago. Where have the years gone?

Some of us are required to utilize this system if you are one of the more than 250 drinking water systems in Illinois which have NPDES regulated discharges for their treatment process and/or backwash effluent which are required to submit monthly DMRs as well.

Some others of us have been lucky enough to be one of the selected drinking water systems to participate in the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Program. I think that it was the UCMR 4 between 2018-2020 which first required the use of CDX to certify the results of the results of these analysis. Isn't that a process! I see that UCMR 5 is in the list of programs currently. There are several other programs and reports that are accessible on CDX also.

If you have not used CDX yet, then I think that it is safe to say that you probably will, because many more of the reports which we must file in the wastewater and drinking water industry will be done through CDX in the future.

If you are a CDX user, then you will likely agree that the most difficult thing to do is to set up your account initially, and/or to add a system. If you are setting up a new account, then I encourage you first to go https://usepa.servicenowservices.com/oeca/icis/en/how-to-create-a-new-netdmr-account?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0014606 and read through the training presentation before starting. There are other tabs with information in the lower section of the homepage, and a frequently asked questions section that can be helpful also, but I find the PowerPoint presentation with the screenshots the easiest for me.

The next suggestion that I have is that you use your personal email to set up your registration, and not a general email for your employer. The system will allow you to change (remove and/or add) communities or systems in case you change employers or assist additional ones, for instance. I had this question posed to me two weeks ago. The gentleman who called was trying to set up the account and the general email address was already recognized in the system, so it was asking for the password. He was concerned that if he changed the password, then he would lock someone else out of accessing the system for whatever program they had used that email to register for in the

first place. This was a valid concern.

When trying to set up the account and you get to Step 5, Part 2, Organization Information, (this is supposed to be your employer) but don't expect to enter your system information and have the system recognize it. I have not had many which it will recognize. I usually must go to Step 6, Part 2, Organization Information and select "request that we add your organization." To submit DMRs once you have completed setting up an account in CDX, you will first have to request access to the specific permit in NetDMR. Once you have finalized your account with CDX and have completed the electronic signature and verification process, you should be able to get into NetDMR. NetDMR is the State specific part of the database which some of you may remember was the first place we were required to utilize to submit DRMs electronically. Then there was a migration to the CDX federal database a few years ago.

To complete this you need to begin in CDX. There you will have to register as a Permittee (signature) to sign and submit DMRs. You will need to add a program service and select a State in CDX (NetDMR > NDMR-IL) which is in the list as you scroll down this page. Once you have registered there, you will need to request access to the permit in NetDMR.

Here is how:

1. Login to CDX and click on Permittee (signature) and then continue to NetDMR
2. Click on "Request Access" at the top of the page
3. Enter your permit number and click "Update"
4. Select "Signatory" under role, and then select "Add Request" and submit
5. Select "Facility" under relationship
6. Only answer question #1 (by selecting the bubble) that states that you have the authority to enter into the agreement. DO NOT complete the second question that names the responsible official, email address, or phone number. Leave ALL the other boxes blank and select submit.
7. Make sure you not only submit the access request, but also sign/submit electronically the subscriber agreement. After viewing the subscriber agreement and closing it, a "Sign" box will pop up. Click that box, enter your password twice and answer the security question. After you have completed this, you will be able to see the access request and approve it within a few minutes.

Note: If it doesn't ask for you to sign and enter your password and security question, then you can complete the signing process from the home screen by clicking on "My Account" and scrolling down to "My Permits." There you will see a button that says "Sign." Clicking on it will then ask for your password twice and a security question. Complete these and then click "Sign." You will have to follow this process for each permit (if you have more than one).

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Once the request is approved by the staff at Illinois EPA, you will be able to submit your DMRs.

The contacts for the CDX Helpdesk are 888-890-1995, or helpdesk@epacdx.net.

If you need help, you can call one of us here at the Illinois Rural Water Association, and we will try to help you get set up.

So, what is the migration to Login.gov. Well, if you are a registered user of CDX, then you have received the same 2 emails which I have received regarding the upcoming migration of the CDX transition to Login.gov. At the time that I am writing this the first 2 dates when the transition was scheduled to occur have come and gone without the transition occurring yet. The next target date for this migration is currently August 16, 2024.

Some of you may have also received an email notification that a Login.gov account is now required to see your Social Security information like I did. No, I'm not that old. I signed up years ago to receive paperless annual statements. Anyway, after I received this notification, I went ahead and set up my Login.gov account. That was very simple.

I have gone through the available information regarding the migration from the links in the emails. There is a 1-minute video showing the migration steps, a slide presentation which you can go through, and additional information in the frequently asked questions. I am including the link in case you don't have the email that included it. https://usepa.servicenow.com/oeca_icis/en/cdx-log-in-transition-to-login-gov-step-by-step-guide?id=kb_article_view&sys_kb_id=ad464b4a1b1a0e909ee5404fe54bcbf4

The next link is to the page with the slide presentation directly. https://usepa.servicenow.com/oeca_icis/en/step-by-step-guide-for-cdx-login-gov-existing-cdx-users-new-to-login-gov?id=kb_article&sys_id=b099ca521ba6c65479ab0f67624bcb39

I'm really going to stick my neck out here by stating that after reviewing all the information, I anticipate that this will be like the migration from NetDMR to CDX. I had hoped that the migration would have occurred before this article was due so that I could provide more details. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, the migration be completed and will have been painless.