



ARE YOU SUSTAINABLE?

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If you haven't heard the latest buzz word floating around, you will shortly – "Sustainability." What is it? Most Operation Specialists have one definition, while other agencies and departments have a varied range of interpretations.

We Operation Specialists, see it as making do with limited resources. That's not sustainability. It's survival! Typically, financial people only see it as revenue. That's only part of the equation. So what is it?

As Operation Specialists, we should be looking at several items at our plants. The most costly item is energy. Have you had an Energy Assessment? New York Rural Water provides this service at no charge. We will review your power supply charges, motor efficiencies, operating cycles and lighting to determine any cost savings and payback periods.

Has your system had a Vulnerability Assessment? Depending on your system, you may or may not be required to do one. However, I recommend that every system have an assessment and review it regularly. These assessments may help avoid costly repairs due to an unplanned event. Your assessment may indicate a simple need for a trash pump or may reveal a more complicated need for an auto transfer stand-by power system.

Do you have an Emergency Response Plan? Again, some facilities are required to have a plan in place. Usually the ERP is based on discoveries found during the Vulnerability Assessment. Your response plan can minimize damage during emergencies. Both the VA and ERP can eliminate or reduce your system's down or event recovery time.

As we all know, the operation specialist workforce is aging and over the next five years it is anticipated that 50% of the water and wastewater workforce will be retiring! This fact alone demonstrates succession planning is, or should be, a major component of a municipality's sustainability.

Generally, most operation specialists make it known well in advanced of their intention to retire. After submitting their retirement papers, the next question is, when should the replacement be onboard for training and orientation. Unfortunately, the typical reply is "we can't afford it until you leave." I say you can't afford not to! Once your operation specialist leaves, a multitude of knowledge and experience leaves with them. Yes, there are maps and other resources available to the new hire. However, it still doesn't replace the experience and knowledge of the retiring operation specialist.

Many systems will be experiencing retirements over the next couple of years. Case and point, several systems have or are about to experience multiple retirements, without a plan for succession. Within the last year, a municipality with five employees has had two operators retire and a third will be retired by the time this article goes to print. These retirements were not surprise retirements. If you look at it from a percentage, that equates to 60% of their workforce that has retired (without a plan for succession). It has proven over and over how difficult and expensive transition is without a plan for succession.

What is the solution? Have a plan! New York Rural Water Association has free downloads for the Vulnerability Assessment and Emergency Response Plan templates. How about enrolling your new hire in our Apprentice Program prior to your staff retirement? 💧💧