



# THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

## Certified Water Operator... Important? You Bet!

By Chuck Mischel, Association Operator Certification  
Technician, North Dakota Rural Water Systems

The role of an operator is very different from what it was 50 years ago; operators were nothing more than laborers or – in larger systems – plumbers or electricians. The basic duties of the operator back then were to make sure the pumps were still running and sewage didn't seep into basements.

When the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act were implemented, the skills, knowledge and responsibilities of an operator increased dramatically. Operators of today should possess a working knowledge of environmental rules and regulations. They must also have the patience and social skills to interact with customers and concerned citizens. Often, the job of dealing with environmental groups, media and elected officials falls on the shoulders of the operator. Finally, the traditional skills required to keep complex pumping and treatment systems running are a lot more difficult today than in the past.

One of the biggest problems facing operators today is that local decision makers (board members, managers and elected officials) often fail to recognize the dedication and expertise that operators display everyday in their jobs. Education, understanding and awareness of all areas of the water system can go a long way in building a good foundation for everyone involved.

So, next time you turn your tap on, remember to thank your local operator for providing you with clean, safe drinking water.

Is there anything operators can do to convey the importance of what they do? You bet! Here are a few suggestions.



- 1. Be an expert at what you do.** It may sound strange, but it is important that you know your job better than anyone else. People will learn to trust your judgment, and you will quickly develop a reputation as a professional. As in everyday business activities or any sports teams, teamwork is the key to being successful – the same goes for utility personnel.
- 2. Project a professional image.** If you act like an unskilled laborer, then that is exactly how the public will treat you. A positive attitude, coupled with a genuine enthusiasm for your job, will go a long way toward elevating your status as a professional.
- 3. Educate the decision makers.** Generally, those in charge want to know at least the basics of how water and wastewater systems operate – and no one is better suited to educate them than you. Whenever possible, take time to explain operational changes or needs, especially when an increase in funding is required.
- 4. Become an ambassador to your community.** It can be a great benefit to you to share your knowledge with citizens in the area. Building friendly relations with local environmental groups, members of the media and even schools can be of tremendous benefit to you personally, as well as your employer. Encourage guided tours of your facilities, especially when new or upgraded facilities are placed into service.

These are just a few helpful tips for operators. There are probably more you can think of to help build strong relationships with local leaders and citizens. As your job grows more and more complex, it is important for the profession to show that being a certified operator is more than just having a certificate on the wall.

If you would like any information, training materials, interactive CDs, etc., pertaining to the Operator Certification Program, contact me at [cmischel@ndrw.org](mailto:cmischel@ndrw.org) or call North Dakota Rural Water Systems at 800-349-6951 or 701-258-9249. Material is free of charge!

# GOLDEN VALLEY HOSTS Sludge Removal Demonstration

By Les Sigette, North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association

On July 18, a sludge removal demonstration was held in the community of Golden Valley. The demonstration was organized by SRS Crisafulli Inc., North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association and the city of Golden Valley.

Troy Fercho, Chad Schipman and Jeff Leete from SRS Crisafulli Inc. were on site to conduct the demonstration. SRS Crisafulli Inc. is a manufacturer of dredging equipment from Glendive, Mont.

Twelve operators and others attended the sludge removal demonstration and were able to get all their questions answered related to dredging and the dredging process.

The demonstration involved removing sludge from the primary wastewater cell and transferring the material to an empty third cell for drying. Operators were also able to operate the dredge by remote control, which has a range of about 300 feet.

It is recommended that sludge levels be measured every 10 to 15 years to determine if any further action is required. Most of the problems found in the primary cell are at the inlet. Solids build up there and cause slowing or even stoppage of the flow into the cell. A sludge judge tool is used to check sludge levels in the primary cell. By this

method, a determination can be made on what sort of action should be taken.

If you would like more information on sludge judging your lagoon, contact North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association at 701-258-9249.

