Black Water and the Operator Shortage

Niagara Falls, New York
New York Water Environment Association
Operator Succession Planning

WEFMAX Nashville
May 30, 2019
NEW OPERATOR CATCH 22

Operator Shortage → Retiring Operators

Retiring Operators → Lack of Candidates

Lack of Candidates → Lack of Programs to Draw New Candidates

Lack of Programs to Draw New Candidates → Schools Unwilling to Develop Programs

Schools Unwilling to Develop Programs → Operator Shortage
STORIES FROM THE FIELD

- **Dannemora**
  - Isolated community, difficult supervisor
  - Remote/contract operators unwilling to travel

- **Little Valley**
  - Utility without a succession plan
  - Chief Operator Retires with no replacement

- **Binghamton-Johnson City**
  - ELAP operator retires
  - Calls NYWEA office looking for help

- **Cortland**
  - Chief Operator Suspension of License
  - No Succession Plan

- **Vernon**
  - Chief operator retires without replacement
  - Comes out of retirement part time

- **Dolgeville**
  - Staffed by two operators ready to retire
  - Successor - 18 months away from licensure
Vulnerabilities

- Challenged with a 35% vacancy rate
- Rate of operator loss to new hires is 3:1 after significant investment in training
- Mandated overtime 95 times in 2017
- Required 10,000 hours overtime ($280,242) in 2017
- Denied vacation requests and delayed promotional opportunities
- Competing against higher salaries and no shift work at local facilities
- Employee morale and fatigue concerns
- Unable to find operators using supplemental contract operations
Improvements

- Eliminated residency for Operator Civil Service exams
- Preapproved residency waivers for operator titles (new hires only)
- Continuous recruitment of Trainees
- Expanded Trainee qualifications
- Upgraded pay rates for all Operator titles
- Update titles to current industry standard
## Albany’s Loss of Operator Manpower in 1.5 years!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Number of New Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shift Operator 3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Shift Operator 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Operator 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Operator 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Operator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**74 % Turnover!**
BUFFALO SEWER AUTHORITY – BY THE NUMBERS

Deliberate Focus Over the Past 5 Years

- Reduced Operator Vacancy by over 10%
- Increased the number of Operators by 13%
- Increased the number of Licensed Operators by 15%
- Increased the number of Operator Trainees by 85%
WHY CAN’T WE FILL OPEN OPERATOR POSITIONS?

Hurdles for Future Operators and Municipalities

- Experience
- Testing
- Training
- Geographic
- Unable to Hire Trainees
- Regulatory
WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

But at NYWEA we are trying to take steps in the right direction...
TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PROGRAM

• Received a WEF grant
• Provided operators with the skill set to train new operators both in the plant and for pre-certification training programs
All municipalities to “opt-in” for an exemption for certified operators for Civil Service Exams.

or

Allow qualified operators to take the appropriate civil service exam and continue the current protocol for hiring.
SHARING OF GOOD SUCCESSION PLANS

Succession Planning White Paper

Operator of the Future
WHITE PAPER January 15, 2016
ARTICLES IN CLEARWATERS

- NYCDEP’s Model for Succession Planning
- Rebranding the Image of Water Resource Recovery
- Changing Operator Titles
- Creating a Solid Succession Plan with Training & Development part of the program.
Focus on exposing high school students to possible careers in the water industry

- Programs are offered regionally and at specific schools within a district
- NYWEA hopes to eventually leverage this program across the state
- Current challenges: refining the curriculum, finding trainers and getting schools willing to participate
• Interest exists among municipalities and operators to start something.
• Interest in both education and looking at ways to develop programs for hands on training.
• Large number of NYWEA members want to do something.
• Utility O&M Committee is already looking at identifying needed skills and curricula to meet that skill set. Looking for them to make a recommendation to the Board on June 9th.
WE WILL ALWAYS NEED CLEAN WATER

Water quality plays a vital role in our everyday lives!

We have to communicate better why a career in water quality is rewarding!
Looking to expand our messaging document to reach high school students, veterans, and others.
Need to relay the high level of satisfaction and pride that many operators have for their work and protection of public health and environment.
Robert Wither, President
Patricia Cerro-Reehil, Executive Director
Paul McGarvey, Water Ambassador & WEF Delegate
Lauren Livermore, Vice President
OJ McFoy, WEF Delegate
Mark Koester, Water Ambassador & WEF Delegate

Thank you!