

Missouri's New Apprenticeships: Drinking Water and Wastewater

In November 2017, Missouri was the second state in the nation to achieve U.S. Department of Labor approved apprenticeship programs for drinking water and wastewater. These are two-year apprenticeships that can allow any level of drinking water or wastewater operators to achieve Journeyman as a Drinking Water Specialist or Wastewater Specialist.

What could it mean for your city? Driven by the circumstances of waning interest in colleges and universities, a growing interest in trades, and the aging workforce issue in the water industry, it is obvious that two things need to occur: professionalism and attracting young people. For too long, the drinking water and wastewater occupations have been viewed as a “maintenance” occupation. However, the truth is that these individuals hold more responsibility for public health than any number of medical facilities. Drinking water, the second most necessary thing in life after breathing, and wastewater, one of the first harbors of potential public disease, present themselves to us as proactive health professions rather than reactive medicine. Even after high-profile incidents such as Flint, Michigan, and the misinformed convenience of bottled water, we recognize that these professions should be acknowledged with greater respect and dignity and should present themselves as health occupations rather than a “maintenance position.” Likewise, we are amidst many municipalities with infrastructure issues that are not of a maintenance



issue, necessarily, but rather of a lack of asset management. Finally, go on a search for a fully competent water or

wastewater employee and you will find their value is far above rubies.

Therefore, offering the opportunities in the industry to be recognized as a responsible professional will demand that the employee be a responsible professional. The apprenticeship program allows the individual the opportunity to demonstrate full competency and professionalism ... not just by “passing an exam.” Who do you want taking



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care of your drinking water and treating your wastewater?

How does this apprenticeship work? The apprenticeships are fully approved by the U.S. Department of Labor and were created and administered by the Missouri Rural Water Association (MRWA). Don't let the name fool you. MRWA is proud of its rural heritage, yet as the only professionally field-staffed water and wastewater organization that provides on-site technical and managerial assistance and training, MRWA is there for all systems of all sizes and works proactively for the entire water industry.

The apprenticeship program is based as a two-year program. It is divided into six-month increments and, as the apprentice works through the program and successfully completes a six-month module, then they receive a pay raise. The program requires components of on-the-job training and in-classroom training. It is also requires

the apprentice to pass a drug screening to enter the program and to successfully acquire Missouri certification in their chosen field. Upon completion, the apprentice, then, receives the designation of Journeyman in either the drinking water or wastewater field. You can be assured that this individual has received hands-on training, classroom training, and the experience to be an outstanding performer.

Additionally, there are many economic development programs to

help you, the employer, in assisting you to train your apprentice. If you have interest in placing an employee in the Water or Wastewater Apprenticeship Program, or if you have interest in hearing from apprentices for potential hire, contact Jim Enterline with Missouri Rural Water Association at jenterline@moruralwater.org, via cell phone at (573) 996-6096, or contact the MRWA office at (573) 657-5533. 🍃

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