Attendees:
Alfredo Sotomayor, DNR; Steve Elmore, DNR; Lon Couillard, Milwaukee Water Works; Nancy Quirk, Green Bay Water Utility; Dave Lawrence, Wisconsin Rural Water Association; Mike Sullivan, Oak Creek Water Utility; Jim Prindle, Onalaska Water Utility; Mary Cardona, WWA notetaker.

1. Welcome – Alfredo Sotomayor

2. Update on DNR Personnel changes – Steve Elmore

The DNR is undergoing a number of staffing changes and has reorganized the regions, now called “districts.” (Updated charts will be available July 1.)

- Lee Boushon has retired and the DNR is in the process of finding a replacement. Until then, Kyle Burton, Manager of the Drinking Water and Groundwater East District is the Acting Section Chief for the Public Water Supply Engineering Section.
- Steve Ales has been promoted to Water Leader for the Southern District. Liesa Lehman-Kerler is filling Steve’s shoes as the Acting Private Water Section Chief until September when she will return to her position as Waterways and Wetlands Chief.
- Sharon Gayan is now the Deputy Water Leader for the Southern District. She is based in the Milwaukee area.
- Rhonda Volz, Drinking Water and Groundwater Supervisor based in the Milwaukee area, retired in January and the DNR is in the process of filling her position, with an announcement due shortly.
- Eric Ebersburger, Water Use Section Chief, will be back in August. His supervisor, Jill Jonas, is the contact until then.
- Water Division Administrator Ken Johnson retired in May and Russ Rasmussen, the Deputy Division Administrator has been promoted to the position. It is not yet known whether or not the deputy position will be filled.
- Florence Olson is the new plan review engineer for the eastern part of Southern District.
- Steve Szymaszek is the new field engineer based at the Milwaukee Service Center.
- Kris Khatri, Plan Review Engineer, was out of the Green Bay office for an extended period but is now back at work.

Some of the DNR Districts have different coverage areas than the old regions. The same engineers will be serving these areas, but they will have the flexibility to cross the old borders when needed.

- Southern District combines the southeast and south central regions.
- Western District is the old west central region.
- Eastern District is the old northeast region.
- Northern District is the old northern region.

District staff are working together to offer consistent enforcement of DNR rules. The shorthand phrase being used to emphasize this idea is “One DNR.”
The DNR Public Water section is now divided into two areas: Public Water Engineering and Public Water Supply.

- Public Water Engineering is in charge of compliance with chapters NR 810 and NR 811 (plan reviews, operation, maintenance of public water systems, small system operator certification, capacity development, and the safe drinking water loan program).
- Public Water Supply is in charge of compliance with chapter NR 809 (Safe Drinking Water Act requirements, drinking water quality, enforcement).

3. Revised Total Coliform Rule (RTCR) and NR 809 Revision – Steve Elmore

The final draft of the DNR’s policy on RTCR level 1 assessments is posted on the DNR website and the public can make comments online. This part of the revised NR 809 rule will go into effect on July 1. Kyle Burton is the lead DNR manager on the revised guidance.


The new rule provision allows water system operators to conduct a level 1 assessment followed by correcting any sanitary defects found as an alternative to emergency chlorination or boil water orders when a system crosses the threshold for positive total coliform levels. The level 1 self-assessment would be certified by the DNR.

The new RTCR rule provision also changes municipal public notice requirements. While a tier 2 public notice will be required after completing a level 1 assessment or emergency chlorination in response to a TC trigger, utilities will be able to avoid issuing a tier 1 notice required by a boil water order as long as it successfully completes a level 1 assessment or an emergency chlorination plan.

The external advisory group held its last meeting on the rule revisions and DNR staff is now doing a final internal review. Steve Elmore has been taking the lead on NR 809 rule revision project. The next stage will be to ask the DNR Board for a public hearing date. The rules are expected to go into effect on April 1, 2016.

4. Fluoride Recommended Levels in Drinking Water – Lon Couillard; Steve Elmore

The federal Department of Health and Human Services has issued a new target of 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter. DNR is revising its rules to require communities that choose to add fluoride to the public water supply to keep the amount to between .6 and .8 milligrams. DNR has found that about one-quarter of communities are still acting under the HHS’s former recommendation of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams per liter.

Discussion ensued about how to handle the active group of people who are against adding fluoride to drinking water. In Milwaukee, Lon Couillard has directed concerned residents to their alders, who would have the power to change the city ordinance to end fluoridation. Robbyn Kuester, the Fluoridation Program Coordinator at the Department of Health Services and Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, the State Dental Director attended a city ordinance hearing in Milwaukee and listened to concerns raised. In Green Bay, Nancy Quirk refers inquiries to the local health department. She also prepared a memo for alders on fluoride that included a list of organizations that support adding fluoride to public water systems among them the AMA, CDC, and the EPA. One of her alders suggested to a concerned group of residents that they circulate a petition. The group returned to the alder with just over 100 signatures. Local dentists organizations can also be tapped to provide supportive information to the public.
The state Department of Health Services has a small amount of money to fund grants for fluoridation equipment. You may contact Robbyn Kuester at Robbyn.Kuester@Wisconsin.gov.

5. Lead and Copper Rule Violations Regional Exemption for Monitoring Outside Regulatory Window – Lon Couillard; Steve Elmore

The EPA is looking at granting Wisconsin a statewide variance to allow water utilities to use alternatives to phosphate to gain compliance with lead and copper rules.

Lead. While adding phosphate to the water supply is thought to be the best way to bring down lead levels, many utilities don’t want to add it since Wisconsin is trying to reduce the amount of phosphate in its waterways. Wastewater treatment plants are looking at huge costs to take it out again.

The EPA is circulating a draft of a variance that would excuse the use of phosphate if the utility removed all lead service lines or implemented a unidirectional flushing plan to clean pipes while maintaining adequate chlorine residuals to discourage corrosion. Unidirectional flushing can remove biofilm, a historical accumulation of metals on pipes. The flushing option may also require some removal of lead lines.

The National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) is studying the issue of lead levels through its lead and copper rule working group. NDWAC is chaired by DNR’s Jill Jonas, who brings years of experience to the council. The group is composed of both regulators and water utilities.

Copper. Jim Prindle led the discussion on the difficulty of always ascertaining the source of copper contamination in pipes. He has found instances where electrical transformers were affecting pipes and is concerned that some copper piping may be of poor grade and leech copper into the water. Investigating instances of high copper levels can be very time-consuming.

The group discussed the idea of operators collecting investigative samples independent from compliance sampling to judge the effectiveness of alternate solutions to elevated levels of copper and lead. Specifically, operators are interested in helping Abigail Cantor with the Water Research Foundation’s research project in this area, but they would like some assurance that if sampling results obtained during the study do not meet standards, operators would not be required to adhere to public education rules. The general thinking was that if investigative samples are taken outside the compliance period, those results do not fall under the public education rules. Operators suggested that a letter indicating this would allow municipal authorities to be more comfortable with participating in the research project. Steve is going to review the matter.

6. Enabling Operators to Make Changes in DNR Website – Jim Prindle; Steve Elmore

Jim suggested allowing operators to directly access and update their information on the DNR website. Each operator could have a password to access their information and any updates could be reviewed and approved by DNR staff before being posted. The system would save DNR hours of staff time and keep the site more up-to-date. For example, operators could add basic information such as the number of service connections and also input deficiency corrections when they are made. The PSC receives a lot of information about water utility operations in mandated reports that could be input on the DNR site. The DNR’s sanitary survey will be done every three years and will contain a lot of good information. Operators hope that the two agencies will share information.
Steve said that the DNR has been thinking about upgrading to an interactive online database for a long time. DNR is currently using an out-of-date form-based system connected to Oracle that cannot be updated except by district engineers and certain data elements only by program associates. It would save the DNR time if operators were able to input their own information. The current system requires a lot of communication for updates, since the engineer first collects the information, then passes it on to the associate who inputs it, then ensures it is correct by confirming it with the operator, and then communicates once again with the associate to go ahead and post.

Steve would welcome Jim’s input into what would be desirable in a new system. Steve noted that consideration needs to be given to the fact that some people are not comfortable using an online database that requires use of a passcode and some people don’t even go online to see the information posted. Steve also pointed out that while in the past, operators were required to simply report the results of sampling, today, compliance involves not only sampling, but also taking specific action to correct physical deficiencies on a specific timetable. This means any new system would need to be able to handle much more complex data. Issues related to data integrity would also need to be addressed with a new system.

7. Operator Certification Levels and Training – Jim Prindle; Steve Elmore

The State of Wisconsin has only one required license level for water operators and more are needed to accommodate the various levels of training required to do various jobs at a water utility. Most states neighboring Wisconsin (Minnesota was cited in particular) have several levels of certification. Many Wisconsin water utilities hire high school students and train them on the job. Some small utilities use people who do not receive any formal training in water utility management and are also responsible for several other community services. While many water utility staff people use the opportunity to educate themselves by attending continuing education seminars available from the PSC, DNR, WWA and WRWA, many municipalities do not approve sending staff to these sessions because they are not required.

Alfredo noted that the rule governing water operator licensing is chapter NR 114, for which revisions are on the verge of concluding. The rulemaking made changes to certification training requirements on the wastewater side because of the extensive changes made to treatment procedures. Except for surface water plants, treatment procedures on the drinking water side have not changed as significantly so it was not the focus. With rulemakings taking three years to complete, a change in training requirements on the drinking water side must be viewed as a long-term goal. Alfredo said the DNR could use the wastewater revisions as a model and impetus for future drinking water operator certification rule changes.

Beth Goldwitz is the point person in the Drinking Water Program who will be organizing a working group that will make improvements to the current Operator 1 certification process and exams. Some goals could be satisfied through this process. Alfredo has spoken with Beth, who is interested in all ideas to upgrade training. Alfredo suggested that the group could review what operators are currently being tested on and craft a follow-up test to ensure operators are retaining the knowledge required. Both Alfredo and Steve told the group that the industry needs to drive this process, but that the DNR can help find a place to start by looking at reports received from operators and identifying areas that need improvement.

8. Projects Requiring DNR Approval – Nancy Quirk; Steve Elmore

The group discussed the interpretation of chapters NR 811 and NR 108, which requires operators to seek DNR approval for system changes when the “quality or quantity” of water is affected. Nancy Quirk brought up a recent example from Green Bay where a chattering pipe problem was solved by inserting a “Christmas tree” valve into the system to better manage water pressure. She learned afterward that she
should have sought DNR approval for this. Nancy did not view this as changing either the “quality or quantity” of water being carried through the system. Attendees cited other examples such as changing a meter to a compound meter or changing the nozzle size in a hydrant from a 3 ½ to a 4 ½ size.

Steve explained that anything that is not a one-to-one change-out needs approval and advised operators to check with field engineers when in doubt; they will always appreciate the phone call. As a rule of thumb, if a pipe change-out is less than 100 feet an operator does not have to seek approval from DNR. In emergency cases, operators may always act without approval from DNR beforehand as long as they seek approval afterward. Field engineers are instructed to approve changes rapidly and to understand when operators need to react quickly in emergencies. While operators might like to have more concrete “game rules,” DNR wants to avoid creating a list that might exclude a situation that should be included. DNR also wants field engineers to have the flexibility to make judgment calls.

9. Water Loss Prevention – Steve Elmore

Steve was at a conference last week and heard what Georgia is implementing to reduce water loss. Due to severe drought conditions in recent years, Georgia passed comprehensive water conservation laws. Systems are required to do a water audit and grants are provided for leak detection. Several people from WWA attended including Jim W. from Wauwatosa and Frank Miller from Cudahy.

The PSC is now collecting and reporting water loss data to help raise the profile of this issue. PSC staff will work with systems that exceed the standard, but there are no penalties. Currently, DNR can only make recommendations.

Utilities may not have the same impetus to improve water efficiency in a water-rich state like Wisconsin, but they should be interested in reducing their electrical and chemical costs. Treating water that is wasted down the line inflates costs unnecessarily. Water loss reports have already shown that the cost of treating water in some communities is $100,000 more per year than it needs to be. Most communities could save between $5,000 and $15,000 if they plugged leaks. Busted mains under roadways can cause huge underground sinkholes and create dangerous situations for motorists and costly road repairs.

Input was sought on how to encourage communities to increase their water efficiency numbers. Dave Lawrence reported that 50% of the work WRWA does is to help small systems detect leaks. A suggestion was made to create a training seminar specifically on this issue and to follow up with resources to help with leak detection as Georgia has done. A letter to mayors might get some action. Perhaps there is a legislative fix. Elected officials could be contacted. Nancy Quirk mentioned that WWA has an efficiency committee that could look into this issue.

10. Other Topics – Electronic distribution of the CCR

Water utilities need to be aware that electronic distribution of the Consumer Confidence Report is now allowed, but that the EPA requires operators to meet several criteria. Operators can provide a link to the report in a mailing as long as the link goes directly to the report. And the utility must “prominently display a message and the direct URL in all mailed notifications of CCR availability.” The report can be emailed with the CCR attached as an image or a direct link, but utilities must provide an alternate method of delivery for people the utility knows do not receive electronic delivery. The American Water Works Association has a summary of the requirements: www.awwa.org/legislation-regulation/regulations/consumer-communication.aspx The DNR also has a certification sheet that details what must be done to adequately provide the CCR to the public: http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/DrinkingWater/documents/CCRcertification.pdf