

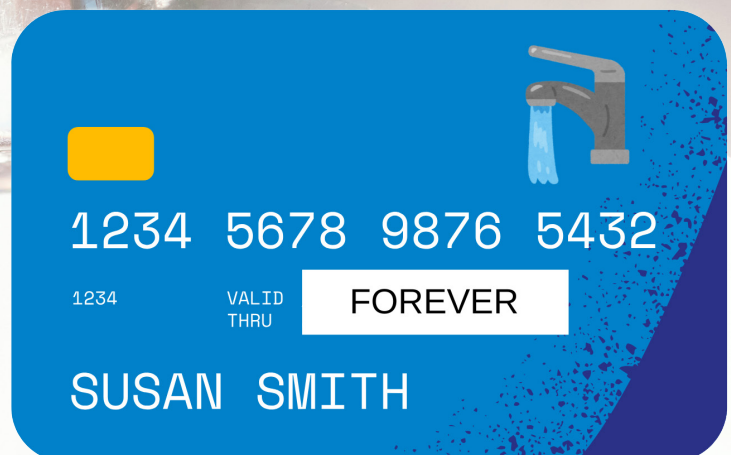


MARCH 2025 | Southern Iowa Rural Water Association

QUENCH

news by the glassful

what's in your water?



CONTENT



on the cover



Publisher Iowa Rural Water Association

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QUENCH Magazine is published 2 times per year by the Iowa Rural Water Association (IRWA). The magazine is distributed by mail to IRWA members' consumers.

The IRWA Mission: To provide the highest leadership in the support of Iowa's water and wastewater industries through the provision of technical assistance, training and education, legislative, regulatory and public affairs, and financing activities.

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Annual Meeting Notice

3

Alert about your Contact Information/
Remembering John Walston

4

Salute to Veterans

5

Water Tower Full Service Maintenance

6

What's in Your Water?

8

So You Wanna Be an Operator...

10

Water Matters: Source Water Protection

12

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SOUTHERN IOWA RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION



Annual Meeting of the Membership

Join us for Coffee and Cookies.

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

1:30 p.m.

NEW LOCATION. . .

3-Mile Lake Lodge

1542 Campground Rd., Afton, IA 50830

ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA

- ◇ Call to order and welcome
- ◇ Introduction of Management Team & Board Members
- ◇ Minutes of 2024 Annual Meeting
- ◇ 2024 Financial Audit
- ◇ Management Team Report
- ◇ Election of Directors
- ◇ Comments from Public
- ◇ Adjournment

BOARD DIRECTOR ELECTION

- ⇒ Election of directors for a 3-year term for the following Counties:
 - Decatur - Larry Griffin*
 - Union - Chad Malmanger*
- ⇒ Election of Taylor County director to fill remaining 2 years of term.

A remote access link for meeting viewing only, will be available on our website—www.sirwa.org—the day of the meeting. The direct link will be listed as an alert .

If you choose to attend remotely you will NOT be able to vote for your district.

***If you feel you have received this publication in error and no longer own property with a SIRWA service connection, please notify the office. Thank you!*

ALERT!

- **Have you done away with your landline?**
- **Do you have a new cell phone number?**

Make sure you never miss out on automated alerts affecting water service in your area.

Call the office at 641-782-5744 and make sure we have your most current phone number listed on your account(s).

Remembering John Walston

September 14, 1943 – September 13, 2024

John's passion and love for the land was his life. He followed in his father Vane's footsteps by joining the SIRWA Board in 2015. John was elected Board Chair in 2018 and remained in that position until his passing in September of 2024. He was very proud of his involvement in helping to continue to provide safe and clean water for the 7 counties and parts of 7 others that SIRWA serves.

John was larger than life and was known for his infectious laugh. He was also known for his big heart and willingness to help anyone he could. He loved his family and friends and will be sorely missed by all who knew and loved him.





SALUTE TO VETERANS

The new flagpole at the SIRWA water treatment plant was installed just in time for Veteran's Day, 2024. It only seemed fitting that the first flag be raised by our own Veterans. Thank you to our staff and everyone who have served our country in order to protect our freedoms.



L to R: Jon, Anna, Matt, Herman and Mike

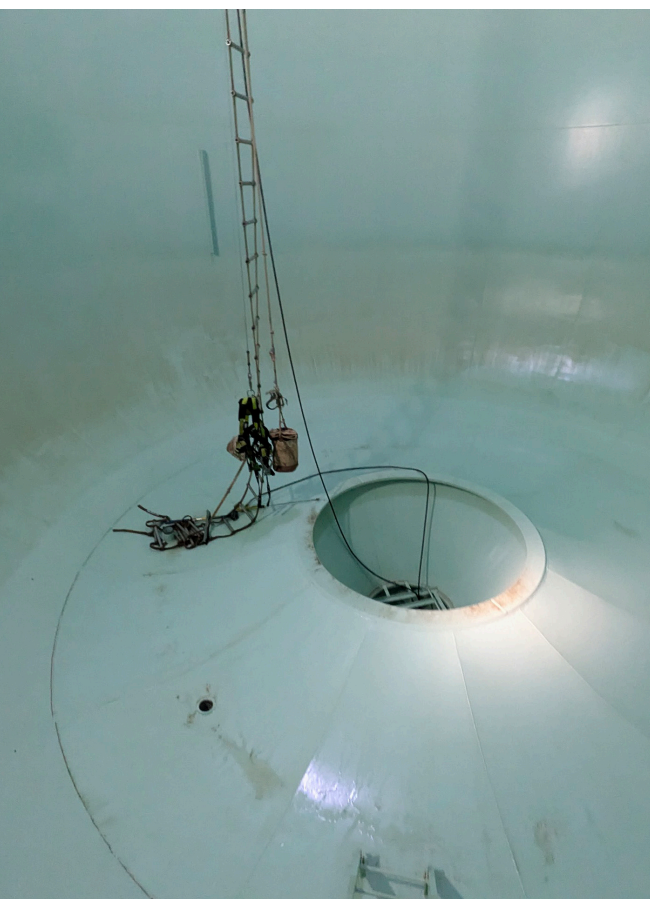
WATER TOWER

Full Service Maintenance

By Chad Mahan

At Southern Iowa Rural Water we believe in long-term preventative maintenance of our infrastructure assets. This strategy allows us to continue to deliver exceptional service to you, our valued customers. The water tanks and towers in our system are no different. These structures are over 100 feet in the air, are exposed to the Iowa elements year-round, and hold treated water to create water pressure for our system so when you turn on your faucet, you can be guaranteed a clean water. To help keep our water towers in like-new condition we partner with Maguire, the water tank experts, who have been maintaining water towers like ours for over 100 years. With Maguire, each one of our water tanks is inspected to keep us in regulatory compliance with the State of Iowa. We also set a schedule for when the tanks will be painted on the inside and outside. Best of all, these full-service maintenance plans allow us to budget for our maintenance making it easier to budget and control our costs. To learn more about Maguire, visit

maguirewater.com





DISCOVER A CAREER IN WATER

Iowa water and wastewater utilities offer challenging and rewarding career opportunities in your neighborhood.



DISCOVER...

Regional systems and communities across Iowa provide life sustaining services to their citizens. You have an opportunity to become a "Hometown Hero" in your city or area.

IF YOU ENJOY:



Problem Solving



Science



the Outdoors

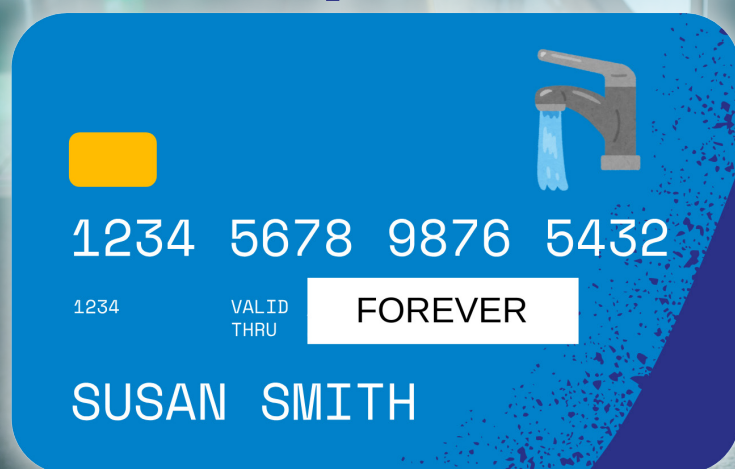


your Community

A Water or Wastewater utility is looking for you!

www.iowaruralwater.org

what's in your water?



By Cathy Law *QUENCH* Editor IRWA



Commercial: When the woman enters the frame, she is wearing a bright-red dress. She stares at the camera (there is a camera), then at the travelers at an airport, then at the camera again. And then she speaks. "It looks like some folks have had it," she says. Bottled water contents and costs are "ridiculous," she says. "I know, so frustrating," she says.

Luckily, there's a cure: Tap Water

You'd be "a lot happier" with it, she says. "It's so easy! Just go to any sink or water fountain and drink as much as you want," she says. "Now that's more like it," she states after she takes a sip from a beautiful, crystal clear glass of water. The people instantly throw their bottled water in the recycle bins and line up to fill their refillable water bottles at a water fountain. While standing in line they start envisioning the money they will save. Before leaving, the woman smiles — then gives the camera one last look. "What's in your water?" she asks. And then she is gone.



Bottled water holds the 2nd largest share of the beverage market in the U.S., ahead of milk and beer. The only thing Americans drink more than bottled water is soda (including energy drinks, sparkling waters, etc.), which is consumed about twice as often. But do we really know what's contained in that convenient plastic bottle? Is it truly the best option for water drinking enthusiasts?

Bottled Water vs Tap Water

It's common knowledge that drinking water offers plenty of health benefits, but if you prefer the kind that comes in plastic bottles, you might not be choosing the best option for your body — not to mention the negative bottled water costs might have on your wallet. Drinking bottled water is estimated to be 2,000 times more expensive than drinking it straight from the tap. As of July 2024, a gallon of bottled water averaged \$9.47 while tap water holds steady at just under one cent per gallon. Keep in mind that figure does not include add-ons such as wastewater costs and trash collection which are often seen on a utility bill.

Many factors lead to the high cost of bottled water. There is the cost of treatment, production, materials, and packaging. Many bottled water companies use a filtration process known as reverse osmosis, as well as enhancing their water products with minerals and flavors. And while, yes, they sometimes taste good, is bottled water the safer, healthier option?

You should know that water utilities in Iowa are required to follow strict sampling and testing procedures. Tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA is responsible for identifying and setting legal limits for contaminants in drinking water under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Currently, the EPA has set legal limits on over 90 contaminants, including heavy metals such as lead and copper, and microbes such as E. coli. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources oversees all aspects of utilities' processes and requires systems to license their operators and ensures they attend continuing education classes to stay up to date on industry changes. The Iowa Rural Water Association is one of the top continuing education issuing agencies in the state for Water Distribution, Water Treatment and Wastewater operator licensing.

There are a few regulations put upon bottled water companies by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but utility regulations from the EPA are much more stringent and are updated more frequently in response to emerging contaminants. Bottled water may also harbor very small pieces of plastic called microplastics. Research suggests that microplastics act as endocrine-disrupting chemicals, promoting inflammation in the body which results in various negative health effects. Microplastics can accumulate over time in vital organs such as the liver, kidneys, and intestines resulting in the disruption of your organs' proper functions.

Environmental Impact

One more thing to consider when purchasing bottled water is the environmental impact. Do we really want all those plastic bottles in our landfill? It's estimated that it takes as long as 450 years for a single plastic bottle to biodegrade. It has been reported many times over that plastic bottles are rarely recycled and that most actually end up in the landfill.



Some say up to 80% of plastic bottle purchases in America are thrown in the trash. Bottled water production also takes a toll on the world's oil supply, with one study estimating that it takes as much as 50 million barrels of oil to produce plastic water bottles each year. Reusable water bottles can cut down on the environmental strain with the added benefit of helping your wallet. You'll be helping Mother Earth in the process of saving your pennies.

Filtration

If you're a diehard water-drinker but still have concerns about tap water taste and/or quality, investing in a quality filtration system is an option. In home options such as a carbon filter or a reverse osmosis system can help remove some contaminants, and smaller filters such as fridge filters help primarily with taste—although it's important to remember that taste is largely subjective. If you do add filtration, it's likely to be cheaper than bottled water in the long run.

It's Personal

The Iowa Rural Water Association holds many training events throughout the year for water and wastewater operators including

three large technical and trade conferences. IRWA also works alongside operators at their own utilities offering technical assistance and problem solving. Utilities around the state implement source water protection plans and look to protect and preserve the water in Iowa's aquifers and surface water sources every single day. There are grants and programs that encourage Iowa farmers to think outside the box when it comes to their farm ground. From creating runoff solutions, no till farming, and new ways to view weed and pest control options, Iowans are looking to protect our aquifers, lakes, rivers, and streams.

We are passionate about water quality in Iowa and there is a reason for that. Drinking water produced in Iowa goes out to our family and friends and there is no greater cause than "Quality on Tap" for those we love. What's in YOUR water? You can confidently have faith in your faucet. Drink local — Get it From the Tap!

References:

<https://waterfilterguru.com/cost-of-bottled-water/>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/tap-water-vs-bottled-water#bottled>



**Matt Bullerman and
Aaron Schroeder**

So, You Wanna Be a *Water Operator?*

By Aaron Schroeder
Source Water Protection Specialist IRWA

So, you wanna be a water operator? — Or maybe you don't, or maybe you have no idea what a water operator does — or even is. Wanting to be a water operator isn't a popular career path for young people; More popular choices seem to be electrician, welder, chemist, plumber, mechanic, public health professional, etc. But what if I told you there's an occupation that lets you be all those things — you guessed it, water operator. Perhaps first, the more important question is "what exactly is a water operator?"

A water or wastewater "operator" is an individual who is responsible for maintaining day-to-day operations of water and wastewater treatment facilities, as well as distribution and collection systems. In short, they ensure that when a faucet is turned on the water is safe to drink. In many ways, water and wastewater operators are the individuals at the forefront of public health; operating water treatment plants, troubleshooting and making repairs, and ensuring water and wastewater meets public health and environmental compliance standards. Being an operator requires certification and licensure, but there is no formal education or experience requirement for many positions. So maybe now you're wondering — how do I become a water operator?

I'll start with a bit about how I entered the industry. While studying at the University of Northern Iowa, I took a summer job with the City of Fort Atkinson, my hometown. I mowed lawns, cleaned buildings, and, among numerous other things, helped with water and wastewater duties. Before my position with the city, I never really considered how my degree in Earth Science could connect to a career in the water industry. A few years and a few courses in hydrogeology later, I started here at IRWA as Source Water Protection Specialist, and I have since obtained my water distribution and water treatment operator licenses.

My position at IRWA has afforded me the opportunity to meet operators from all over Iowa, where I've learned that much like myself, many in the industry didn't set out to be water operators. Often, they enter the field mid-career, transitioning from one of the trades mentioned earlier. Whether it be locating and fixing water leaks, wiring in a new pump, or general plant repair, backgrounds in fields such as plumbing, electrical work, and construction have direct applications in the industry. Take for example, Matt Bullerman with the City of Calmar who I interviewed for this article. Matt entered the water industry in his late twenties. Before working as an operator, Matt was an electrician.



When asked what specifically appealed to him about being an operator, Matt responded, “working for the city allows me some flexibility in my hours, which gives me the opportunity to spend more time farming and with my family, while still being able to use my background as an electrician.” Matt has now been with the city of Calmar for 14 years. He cites those factors, along with “the excellent benefits of being a city employee” for his longevity in the field.

Don’t take a later entry into the field as a negative thing, as many individuals who become water and wastewater operators stay in the industry until retirement. In fact, we’re currently experiencing what we call the “gray wave” as many licensed operators are approaching retirement and there is an urgent need for new people to enter the field. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects over 10,000 yearly vacancies nationwide in the water and wastewater industry for the next 10-years. In response to the need for skilled water and wastewater operators, many community colleges in Iowa now offer technical programs to train new operators, and many water and wastewater systems will support new hires as they work toward getting their licenses.

While the role of a water and wastewater operator might not be the first career choice that comes to mind, it is an incredibly important and rewarding profession. Water and wastewater operators are essential to ensuring safe, clean water and wastewater — protecting both public health and the environment. Whether they’re early in their career or transitioning from trades such as plumbing, electrical work, or construction, many individuals find long-term satisfaction in the water industry. Factoring this plus good benefits, flexibility, and an industry-wide need for new operators makes it a great field to consider. So, whatever your background and skillset, there’s a place in the water industry for you.





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WATER MATTERS

Source Water Protection

What is Source Water?

Source water is untreated water from surface and ground sources. Groundwater is water from rain or snow that seeps below the ground and pools in cracks and spaces beneath the earth's surface. It is a valuable resource as it makes up for over 75% of Iowa's drinking water. Groundwater supplies are not endless and can be depleted. Human activities can pollute groundwater so severely that the damage may be very difficult and costly to clean up. An Iowa drought can also create source depletion.

What is Source Water Protection?

Source Water Protection is simply protecting your source of drinking water from contamination or overuse. To ensure water quality and quantity is maintained, managing various influences should be made a priority. Potential negative influences on your drinking water source include natural and human activities.

Why do we need Source Water Protection?

Many public water supplies in Iowa depend on ground water resources, known as aquifers, to meet the needs of their customers. Protection of these aquifers helps ensure that both current and future users can count on clean and safe water. Protection can:

- Ensure that enough safe, clean drinking water is available for our communities.
- Protect current and future sources of Municipal drinking water.
- Safeguard our health and the health of our families.
- Prevent costly remediation efforts to your utility system and increases in utility bills.

What can I do to help protect the source of water?

Recognize that many of our actions can potentially impact our water supplies.

- Don't dump old lawn chemicals, gas or oil on the ground.

- Encourage your local county and city governments to adopt source water protection measures.
- Encourage your utility to contact the Iowa Rural Water Association for assistance in creating a Source Water Protection Plan, if they haven't already.
- Have them visit www.IowaRuralWater.org for contact information.
- Support source water protection efforts by your local public water supply.

To learn more about source water/ground water protection, contact your local public water supplier or check the websites listed below.

- Iowa Department of Environment & Natural Resources
<https://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection>
- U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/sourcewaterprotection/local-source-water-protection-measures

*Safe, clean drinking water:
it's everyone's responsibility.*