



National Rural Water Association

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NRWA Announces Creation of Workforce Advancement Center

The National Rural Water Association, the nation's largest water utility association with over 31,000 members, announced the creation of the NRWA Workforce Advancement Center today during a joint ceremony with the Oklahoma Rural Water Association at NRWA's headquarters in Duncan, Okla. The Center will develop the **WaterPro Apprenticeship Program**, a nationally recognized standard that will be registered with the U.S. Department of Labor.

“The NRWA Workforce Advancement Center will ensure a well-trained and capable water sector workforce to meet the increasing demands of the water industry,” said NRWA CEO Sam Wade. “Advancements in water treatment and supply technology have increased the skills and training needed to protect public health and the environment. The apprenticeship program will ensure we have the skilled and educated workforce we need well into the future.”

NRWA State Affiliates will jointly make the announcement at training events for water and wastewater operations specialists in California, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Indiana, West Virginia and New York. The announcement and events will commemorate National Apprenticeship Week 2016 and will highlight the need for a national water sector apprenticeship initiative.

It takes over 380,000 highly skilled water and wastewater personnel to ensure the public supply of safe drinking water and to protect our lakes, streams and groundwater. Advancements in water treatment and supply technology have increased the skills and training required of this workforce. Water professionals are ultimately responsible for meeting stringent regulatory standards, replacing aging infrastructure, recruiting and training new operations specialists, and responding to and recovering from disasters.

In addition to increasing professional demands, utilities will soon be forced to replace many of their most experienced employees. Between 2010 and 2020, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of the workforce to retirement. Many of these employees have worked at the same utility for the majority of their careers, and they will depart with decades of valuable institutional knowledge.

NRWA and State Affiliates currently provide training on operator certification, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, utility management and governance to 80,000 water professionals annually in all 50 states. Last year, over 55,000 on-site consultations were delivered by NRWA's technical experts for water quality, energy efficiency, source water protection, technical assistance and emergency response. Today's announcement furthers NRWA's commitment to developing and enhancing the professionalism of the water sector workforce.

"I commend the National Rural Water Association on its new NRWA Workforce Advancement Center and its efforts to create a rural water workforce apprenticeship program," said USDA Rural Utilities Service Administrator Brandon McBride. "Both efforts will strengthen our rural network of water and waste systems and create meaningful job opportunities in rural America. These actions also build upon the continuing partnership between USDA's Rural Utilities Service and NRWA to modernize water and wastewater infrastructure and to develop a new generation of experts who will successfully operate and manage that infrastructure."

The WaterPro Apprenticeship program will initially be tailored to water system operations specialists, wastewater system operations specialists, and water utility system customer service personnel. In addition, the NRWA Workforce Advancement Center will develop career pathways into the water sector for high school students, establish industry training certifications, connect workers with employers through a job network, and serve as an online clearinghouse for resources.

To support this initiative or obtain further information, contact NRWA or visit www.nrwa.org.

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