



THE GREAT LAKES RCAP Connection

The Voice of the Great Lakes Rural Community Assistance Program

The Art of Appropriate Planning for Small Communities

By Pejmaan Fallah and Steve Malone

Ohio EPA, Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

Facilities planning is an important tool in developing technically appropriate, economically affordable and environmentally sound solutions to meet communities' municipal infrastructure needs, particularly in the realm of drinking water and wastewater treatment. While communities of all sizes can benefit from a good facilities plan, an adequate level of planning is essential for villages and other smaller entities, and can be the difference between a successful project and a costly failure. So, how do you ensure that your local community/client is one of the successes?

A good facilities plan should highlight the primary steps involved in developing and implementing a public water/wastewater infrastructure project from beginning to end. Here are some important questions to ask:

- What is the nature of the existing problem(s) that the planning effort seeks to address?
- What are the future needs of the planning area likely to be and how might they differ from the current situation?
- What types of alternative strategies/technologies are appropriate to address the identified water/wastewater needs?
- Which one of these is the cost-effective solution, based on monetary and non-monetary factors?
- Where will the project components be located and how much will they cost, based on preliminary engineering results?
- What is the range of total user charges that will support the capital, operation and maintenance, and replacement expenses of the system that the community can afford (i.e. affordability)?
- When will project construction begin and how long will it take to complete?
- What type of process was used to provide information to the local public about the project (solicit their comments and concerns)?
- How is implementation of the project likely to affect existing user rates or create new user costs where none currently exist?



- What other short- and long-term impacts is the project likely to have on the human and natural environment of the planning area, particularly sensitive resources like streams and wetlands?

Taken together, these elements should provide the planning overview needed to develop a water/wastewater project that is appropriate for your community's needs. Many of these elements are called for in standards for wastewater planning published by a committee of environmental and public health managers in the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi States.

So, how do communities typically proceed when faced with major water or wastewater infrastructure challenges? All too often, they or their consultants gravitate immediately toward a "solution" to the problem, without really analyzing the extent of the community's needs or weighing the pros and cons of various feasible alternatives. Then, they look for sufficient funding, usually grants, to allow them to implement this pre-determined project.

Unfortunately, picking an off-the-shelf solution to address a community's unique circumstances and/or allowing available funding to dictate how much – or how little – to spend on local infrastructure needs can result in inadequate projects that don't solve long-term needs, or expensive projects that the community can't afford to properly operate and maintain.

In an age of tighter budgets and reduced

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Great Lakes RCAP assists rural communities in developing and maintaining community infrastructure and meeting other community development goals to improve quality of life.

Great Lakes RCAP is a member of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership. RCAP is a national network of regional non-profit organization that provide comprehensive, on-site technical assistance and training to help small, rural communities address their drinking water, wastewater, and other community development needs.

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grant funding, it is vital that you first identify your community's specific water/wastewater problems and the unique characteristics of your area. Once you know exactly what you're faced with, you can better evaluate all the options available to you; traditional vs. innovative, low-tech vs. high maintenance, local vs. regional, and so forth. By evaluating alternatives that meet your particular needs, including reasonably anticipated long-term operation and maintenance responsibilities, you have the best chance of implementing an affordable, sustainable project.

Once your community has determined the most cost-effective solution to the identified problem(s), based on appropriate monetary and non-monetary factors, making the case for an affordable funding package becomes much easier. Rather than arguing about why other potential solutions weren't evaluated or debating whether or not the community can afford to operate and maintain the project you've proposed, the focus can turn to where it needs to be: different funding options to help make implementing the project as attractive as possible.

Appropriate planning leads to informed decisions. As part of this process, good planning and effective public participation aligns local decision makers, area residents and any other project stakeholders (regional groups, state agencies, etc.).

Based on our experience, we suggest adhering to the following six components that can contribute greatly to the success of project planning:

- A) Recognize that the planning process is a step-by-step journey that should be specifically tailored for each community, with a wide scope being better than a narrow focus.
- B) One of the most critical ingredients is the community leadership throughout the planning process. The communities should be the owners and the main drivers of the planning process. More often than not, communities that take an active, hands-on leadership role in the planning process end up with better results in comparison to the communities that prefer a more hands-off approach, simply waiting for a recommended solution and then finding out whether or not they can afford to build it. Communities may even want to identify a person or persons to act as the liaison for the community during the planning process. Communities such as Amesville, Lore City and Middleport in Ohio continue to serve as examples for other small communities through their exemplary leadership. Their continuous involvement during the planning process has helped to produce successful outcomes.

C) Another key component is the willingness of the project consultants to explore new solutions and make room for creative and innovative ideas. Consultants can be extremely instrumental during the planning process to help identify affordable, sustainable and environmentally sound solutions for their client communities. While it may be cliché to talk about "thinking outside the box," that is often what is needed in small communities and consultants are often in the best position to offer unique, locally appropriate solutions.

D) Communication among whoever is involved with your facilities planning (local officials, consultants, citizens groups, EPA personnel, etc.) is an essential ingredient. Effective communication will help to keep everyone on the same page and eliminate the elements of surprise or unforeseen outcomes. It takes everyone invested in the project to produce a desirable outcome. As such, ongoing communication will create a forum to exchange ideas, prevents misunderstandings that are typically attributed to functioning in a vacuum, and help the planning effort to stay focused.

E) Build a resource provider team to assist with technical, financial and administrative issues. Resource providers could include, as needed, EPA, the Rural Community Assistance Program, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development arm, to name a few. Partnership among the communities, their consultants and the appropriate resource providers that are available to small communities has resulted in significantly better project outcomes.

F) Include an effective public participation process. Public involvement throughout the planning phase and beyond gives residents a sense of ownership in their communities' projects. An informed public can be a great ally; residents who understand their infrastructure needs are more likely to accept the project and support the necessity of increasing user charges. For successful planning, it is never too early to get the public involved.

Using this hands-on, community-specific approach, small and economically hard-pressed towns and villages will reap the benefits. Communities will find affordable solutions that alleviate their water/wastewater problems, consultants will design implementable projects and the nation will move closer to addressing its remaining water quality problems, one community at a time.

DeWitt, Illinois: Ahead in the Sand of an Arsenic Rich Aquifer

By Pat Gleason, Illinois RCAP

When the EPA adopted a new standard for arsenic in drinking water at 10 parts per billion (ppb), replacing the old standard of 50 ppb in 2002, the Village of Dewitt was proactive and contracted with an engineering firm to rectify their arsenic issue so that they would be in compliance by the 2006 deadline.

However they were unsuccessful at their endeavor as test results continued to show that the arsenic levels were consistently over the 10 ppb mcl and they felt that they had reached a dead-end. They had spent all their reserves on the project, they were unwilling to raise rates, and their customers continued receiving notification of the water system's inability to meet the MCL.

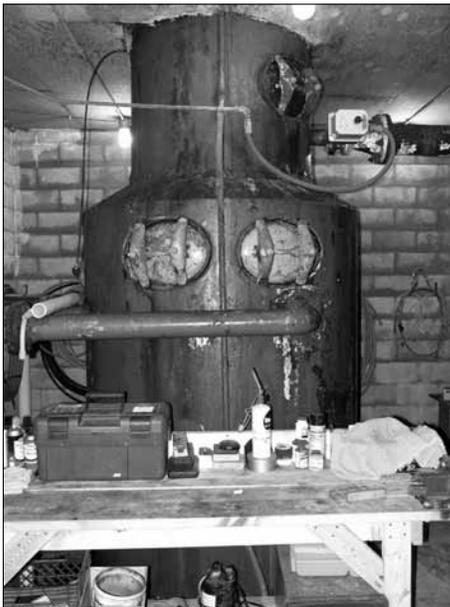
There is an old myth that an ostrich will place their head in the sand when scared. This can also occur when a small community reaches what they think is a dead-end. Illinois RCAP met with the Village President and on-site operator who were shouldering the load as how to rectify the problem. The operator mentioned a number of times that he would happily drive to the primacy agency and drop the keys to the water plant off to the first person he saw in the Illinois EPA office. Illinois RCAP informed him that they would not be interested in the keys; they wanted the community rectifying their arsenic issue. Further, Illinois RCAP advised the Village that with proper planning and a solid game plan this could all end soon provided that appropriate steps were made in fulfilling their duties as a community board. The heads were out of the sand and the community was now prepared to meet their challenges head on.

RCAP met with the water committee and performed a needs assessment. The results of the needs assessment demonstrated that the community's inability to meet the arsenic MCL was only a symptom of a larger issue. The community had not raised their rates in many years, had no asset management plan and the filter, that they had added green sand to as a means to minimize the arsenic, was grossly undersized and past its life expectancy. The assessment also illustrated that when the system was originally conceptualized and constructed, the community leaders did not require all residents to hook up to the system, nor did they require those residents that did hook up to eliminate their private wells.

After RCAP provided project development and quality based selection training to the board (some who are water customers and others whom are not), assisted them with increasing their water rates, conducted an income survey, wrote a compliance timeline for the USEPA Region V office and wrote a successful Small Systems Compliance Grant (SSCG). The SSCG is a grant program that the IEPA offered for one year and was extremely helpful to a number of small communities struggling to achieve compliance.

The SSCG grant enabled DeWitt to pay for the planning and construction fees. Unfortunately, the grant will not pay for the entirety of the arsenic removal project. As such, the community is also working with Illinois RCAP to locate the remaining funds needed to finish the project.

At the beginning of this article we considered the myth that ostriches place their head in the sand when scared when actually they are checking on an egg buried in the ground, protecting and tending to their potential off spring, the next generation. Now, if one were to comment on the Village of DeWitt having their head in the sand; it would certainly refer to them checking in on and better managing their nest egg and the "soon to arrive" next generation of their improved water system.





CHALYBEATE COMMUNITY WASTEWATER PROJECT - PLANNING TO CONSTRUCTION

By *Melissa A. Melton, Kentucky RCAP*

The need for a sanitary sewer collection system is great throughout Edmonson County where underground cave systems are prevalent. Green River winds east to west while the Nolin River runs south flowing into the Green River just north of the county seat of Brownsville. The Green and Nolin Rivers create valleys, streams, and creeks with the added impact of underground caves. The karst topography generally does not allow for adequate percolation rates for septic systems while the hilly terrain often causes difficulty in the laying out and installation of lateral lines. Because of these and other conditions, most of the existing private septic systems within Edmonson County are failing. Not an exception to this fact is the heavily populated unincorporated Chalybeate Community lying within rural south-central Edmonson County, Kentucky. Chalybeate is home to some 245 households, an elementary school, and several scattered businesses including a child daycare center, a sum of 375 customers' total. Of the 245 existing septic systems to be eliminated with this project, 125 were identified as failing by the local health department. Edmonson County Water District (ECWD) continues to be proactive by laying wastewater collection lines to help reduce the flow of pollution into the ground and surface waters and to protect the beloved Mammoth Cave, a treasure of Edmonson County, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and the world.



“Mammoth Cave, by far the world’s longest known cave system, is the heart of the South-Central Kentucky karst, an integrated set of subterranean drainage basins covering more than 1,050 square kilometers - 400 square miles. Atop this labyrinth is a biologically diverse set of ecosystems inextricably interlinked with the ecosystems underground.”¹ “Mammoth Cave National Park preserves the cave system and a part of the Green River valley and hilly country of south central Kentucky. This is the world’s longest known cave system, with more than 390 miles explored. Early guide Stephen Bishop called the cave a ‘grand, gloomy and peculiar place,’ but its vast chambers and complex labyrinths have earned its name - Mammoth.”²

Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) has been providing Edmonson County assistance for some years on multiple projects. The Kentucky Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) serving Edmonson County is honored to be part of ECWD’s second rural wastewater project- many years in the making. Most of those years spent in planning with identifying various feasible project scopes, selecting the scope, securing project funding, and negotiating a wastewater treatment contract. Ensuring that the appropriate planning of this project was maximized, local and regional leaders thoroughly reviewed the Chalybeate Community Sewer Project through the Kentucky Water Resource Information System (KWRIS), the 2011 Kentucky Association Mapping Professional Exemplary System Award winner. “The Water Resource Information System (WRIS) has been developed through the cooperative efforts of water and wastewater treatment systems and local, regional, and state agencies. It is used by all these entities, and provides much of the information needed for all aspects of water resource planning--from watershed protection to infrastructure development. The WRIS includes a geographic information system (GIS), and information on water resources, drinking water systems, wastewater treatment systems, project development, emergency response, regulations, and planning. The WRIS is comprised of strategic plans, water resource maps and publications, systems management information, reporting and regulatory requirements, guidance and training documents, procedural guidance and forms for project implementation and funding, and internet links to support services. Interactive maps in the system support planning and regionalization efforts. The interactive



maps also facilitate drought monitoring and response, and rapid response to contamination emergencies. The GIS contains data for water and wastewater treatment facilities, water lines, water sources, storage facilities, sewer lines, and a database of non-spatial systems information. The GIS provides the fundamental data needed for the planning and emergency response activities. Using the GIS infrastructure data in computer models allows for cost-effective analysis of engineering alternatives, and facilitates the efficiencies need to meet the needs of Kentucky’s infrastructure development.”⁴

Within Chalybeate, a pressurized sewer system has been identified as the most cost effective for the District; however, greater costs will be incurred by the customers. The collection system project began to take fruition with the initial funding being awarded to the County Fiscal Court by the Kentucky

Legislature of \$960,000 tobacco settlement monies as seed money in 2005. The Kentucky Legislature followed up by awarding the Edmonson County Water District an additional \$700,000 in 2008 while also providing Caveland Environmental Authority grant monies to assist with the construction of this project. These funding efforts were led by then State Legislators, Representative Dottie Simms (D) and Senator Richie Sanders (R).

Chalybeate Community Sewer Project construction bids were opened on September 11, 2012 and Stott's Construction Company of Columbia, KY was awarded the contract in October. Construction was well underway in November by both Caveland Environmental Authority staff and Stott's construction crews for ECWD. Being the Project Administrator for the Edmonson County grant funds, the RCAP TAP was onsite in November performing a monthly inspection of stored materials and construction. The monthly inspections will continue until the project is completed and the Chalybeate Community Wastewater Collection System is online. Public meetings for "service sign-ups" are planned as well as meetings to provide information on the use and maintenance of the customers' individual grinder pumps.

¹ <http://www.nps.gov/macal/naturescience/naturalfeaturesandecosystems.htm>

² <http://www.nps.gov/macal/>

³ <http://www.nps.gov/macal/photosmultimedia/below.htm>

⁴ <http://kia.ky.gov/wris/>



KOONTZ LAKE WASTEWATER PROJECT

By Vicki L. Perry, Indiana RCAP

In 2004, RCAP received a request for help with sewage issues from residents of this small lake community in northern Indiana. Due to small lots, slowly permeable soils, and a perched high water table, onsite septic systems were no longer functioning correctly. The citizens and the health department were concerned about the lake's water quality and recreational value. Additionally, they were worried about drinking water contamination, as the homes were on private wells, many of which were shallow and located too close to the failing septic systems.

RCAP quickly set up a citizen steering committee and developed a project timeline. The group chose to form a regional sewer district to oversee the management of the project, and RCAP helped them with the legal process and documentation of forming the district. The newly-formed Koontz Lake Regional Sewer District (KLRSD) Board participated in RCAP's Small Utility Board Training. Meanwhile, RCAP coordinated a free well-testing event, where residents could have their drinking water tested for waterborne pathogens. RCAP also tested surface water in the area.

RCAP helped the Board procure an engineer to do a planning study and environmental review. It was decided that a wastewater treatment plant to service all the homes around the lake would be the most viable option.

The project moved quickly into the funding phase. A USDA loan and grant package was identified as the most likely source of funding. However, at a price tag of approximately \$14 million, USDA Rural Development was unsure it would be able to fund the project all in one year. Everyone was concerned that phasing the project over two or more years would add not only time but additional cost to the project. In early 2009, USDA RD informed RCAP that because of the ARRA stimulus package, the agency would have enough grant money available to fund the project all in one year! In April 2009, USDA-RD committed \$6,439,000 as a grant and \$7,873,000 as a low-interest loan.

During construction of their "clean water plant", RCAP helped the District create start-up policies and procedures and helped low-income homeowners find financial assistance to connect to the system.

The Koontz Lake Regional Sewer District's ribbon-cutting ceremony was July 20, 2012. RCAP continues to assist the District by advising on financial and managerial issues, such as budgeting, billing and collections, job descriptions, reporting, and connection enforcement.



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Government Accountability Office Affirms Federal Arrangement of EPA and USDA Programs for Water Infrastructure Funding

A new report finds that no duplication at the federal level exists among the programs of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provide drinking water and wastewater infrastructure funding to small, rural communities.

However, the report, authored by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), recommends that EPA and USDA make changes to eliminate inefficiencies on the state and community levels to make it easier for communities to apply for and prepare for funding from these agencies for water infrastructure work.

In the report, "Rural Water Infrastructure: Additional Coordination Can Help Avoid Potentially Duplicative Application Requirements," GAO recommended changes by the agencies specifically to "help states develop uniform preliminary engineering reports, develop guidelines to help states develop uniform environmental analyses, and reemphasize the importance of state-level coordination." EPA and USDA oversee the three largest federally funded drinking water and wastewater funding programs for communities with populations of 10,000 or less.

RCAP's work is related to these programs in key ways.

Communities that RCAP assists for no charge relate in a direct and beneficial way from the programs of these agencies. Many water infrastructure projects in communities where RCAP is working apply for and receive funding from the EPA's Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs and the USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Water and Waste Disposal program. RCAP staff assist the staff and board members of water utilities in communities with the application process for funding from these programs and with the other steps that are required to become eligible for loans and grants from these programs. It is on the applications and other requirements that GAO was making its recommendations.

RCAP also receives direct grants for its general operating budget to employ 140 staff members across the country to provide technical, managerial and financial assistance to small, rural communities from both the EPA's and USDA's water-related programs.

"We are pleased to see the GAO affirm what we already knew: The State Revolving Fund programs and Rural Utilities Service's water and wastewater programs are not duplicative, but rather are complementary," said Ari Neumann, Director of Policy Development and Applied Research in RCAP's national office in Washington, D.C. He explained that together, the three programs serve water systems of all sizes, from small to large. "These programs contribute to the world-class clean and safe water and wastewater treatment that Americans expect and deserve."

Neumann added that even with the three programs in place, they do not go far enough. "At the current levels of funding, they still do not address the nation's continuing needs for water infrastructure financing, which EPA estimates are in excess of \$600 billion over the next two decades," he said.

"We agree with the report's recommendations that the agencies should collaborate more to ensure that communities are subject to one uniform set of requirements and are pleased by the efforts that are currently underway at the federal level to standardize and streamline the application processes."

Read the full report at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/649553.pdf>

Continued. . .Koontz Lake Wastewater Project

"The process...started when RCAP began working with what became the Board of the KLRSD. It's like eating an elephant, one bite at a time: Board training, IRSDA membership, evaluation of funding alternatives, budgeting, fighting the battles to get District status, selection of consultants, PER, selecting a funding agency, working with USDA RD, getting the Grant/Loan package, the heartbreak of learning the magnitude of our project required spreading funding and thus engineering and construction over a 2 fiscal year period, and then getting the ARRA boost. RCAP was with us every step of the way, providing assistance, resources, and advice. It would never have happened without RCAP, and we'll be leaning on them for some time to come..."

Certainly the Sewer Committee had the desire, will, and tenacity to drag this community into the 21st century, but not the knowledge base or tools to accomplish the mission. RCAP gave us those tools. After our Board, the single most important factor in our success to date is RCAP."

~Paul Warnke, President, KLRSD



MICHIGAN RCAP'S HHS/OCS: SAFETY & SECURITY END SUMMARY

By Michael Burrington, Michigan RCAP

Michigan's Rural Community Assistance Program (RCAP) State Coordinator Christie Cook, continued to actively participate in the Michigan Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network's Steering Committee during the previous program year and was responsible for preparing and updating the Draft Michigan Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network's, (MiWARN), Operation Plan. The Fifth Draft of the Operational Plan was recently reviewed and approved at the most recent State Steering Committee Meeting, held in Lansing, MI on August 27th, 2012. Ms. Cook attended all four of the State Steering Committee Meetings held during the year. She also serves the Michigan Water and Wastewater Agency Response Networks State Steering Committee as an original participant in an advisory capacity as an associate member.

Two Security and Emergency Response Training events were held in Michigan by Michigan RCAP Technical Assistance Provider's Michael Burrington and Christie Cook. These trainings were granted 0.6 Continuing Education Credits, after receiving approval from the Michigan DEQ Training Committee, when the courses were submitted for renewal. One training event was held in Gaylord, Michigan on May 23, 2012. The second training event was held in Holland, Michigan on September 20, 2012. The May training was attended by twenty-one water and wastewater operators representing 7 different systems and the May training was attended by 26 operators representing 21 different systems. One additional training relating to assessing vulnerabilities and preparing emergency response plans was presented, as well, to the Washington Manufactured Home Community.

The two Security and Emergency Response Trainings for Small Systems included table top exercises that were created by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Tabletop exercise takes operators through a significant rain event that results in widespread electric power outages and area-wide severe flooding. Within the confines of a classroom type setting, the attendees work their way through the tabletop exercise's natural disaster without ever getting wet in this simulated exercise. In addition to the recovery from the imaginary disaster, the participants learned about the most recent updates to the State's drinking water and wastewater treatment regulations affecting them, current threats that they should be away of, information on the importance of asset management to disaster recovery and being prepared to respond and recover, along with preparing and updating their vulnerability assessments and emergency response plans during these day long training events. Participants were provided with information on resources available to them for updating these plans, as well as detecting threat, being prepared for, responding to and preventing emergencies.



Participants working through the Table Top Exercises "Natural Disaster" in small groups at the Security and Emergency Response Training held in Holland, Michigan on September 20, 2012.

Free Online Program Educates Homeowners with Water Wells

Steve Wilson, Illinois State Water Survey & Illinois Water Resources Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Homeowners in small communities and rural areas without a public water supply often don't fully understand how to manage, operate, and protect their private well.

The Illinois State Water survey and the Illinois Water Resources Center at the University of Illinois are pleased to announce a new nationwide training initiative funded by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Private Well Class is a free, step-by-step education program to help well owners understand groundwater basics, well care best practices, and how to find assistance. It will also teach well owners how to sample their well, how to interpret sample results, and what they can do to protect their well and source water from contamination.

The program combines a 10-part online class with live, interactive webinar events in which the material will be reinforced and questions answered. Steve Wilson, a groundwater hydrologist with the Illinois State Water Survey with over 20 years of experience working with private well owners, will serve as the primary instructor for the Private Well Class.

The Private Well Class seeks partners in various sectors to extend the reach of this initiative and connect with private well owners. State agencies, local governments, and industry professionals alike are invited to become a partner and assist with promoting this free service. We especially invite partners to host webinar viewing events that facilitate questions and answers about local groundwater issues.

For more information visit the Private Well Class website (<http://www.privatewellclass.org>) or contact info@privatewellclass.org.





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OHIO RCAP TAKES TRAINING ON-LINE

Ohio RCAP has put their first two 'Board Trainings' on-line. With a grant from and in conjunction with the Ohio EPA Division of Drinking and Ground Water (DDGW), Ohio RCAP's Utility and Financial Management trainings have been adapted and made available to participants on the Internet.

The two courses, Utility Management for Local Officials which covers the technical, managerial, and financial aspects of operating a water utility, and Financial Management for Local Officials, which covers polices, records, billing, and asset management, currently are five hour classroom courses usually given during weekdays. This made it difficult for local officials to take off work in order to attend. After the decision to develop these courses into interactive on-line training, these two classes were reworked into three hour sessions and went live in the late summer of 2012.

Since these courses are now so accessible, Ohio EPA DDGW decided to require communities receiving Principal Forgiveness funding for their drinking water projects to have a minimum of 50% of their decision making body (Council/Board) attend and complete both of these two trainings.

Each course, whether classroom or on-line, has three components. All portions also are approved for Ohio EPA operator contact hours.

The classroom courses typically require a full day of training plus travel, but allow participants to interact and share thoughts and ideas with other community attendees. The on-line courses are shorter and can be taken in the convenience of one's own home. If you need to stop during the on-line course, your stopping point in the training automatically is marked and will return you to the spot you last were when you return. Upon completion of all three sections of each course, you can print a certificate. The on-line courses are interactive in that there are short video type highlights and quizzes throughout. Each part has a test at the end where the participant is required to get all the questions correct to complete the course and get the certificate. Also, there is a minimum time limit that must be spent on each course before the certificate can be printed. This time limit is shown on the screen as a countdown of seconds spent on the training.

A link to the online training can be found at www.OhioRCAP.org.

