

By Neda Simeonova



Aging Workforce: Obstacles & Opportunities

Unemployment may be down from 2009, according to reports, but there are still more than 9 million people without a job. For most current job sectors, there are more applicants than positions; however, the water and wastewater sector might be an exception.

Last year's *Water & Wastes Digest* State of the Industry Report revealed that the average age of water utility workers was 55, and more than one-third of surveyed respondents were 60 or older.

With at least 70 million baby boomers expected to retire before 2030, according to the Social Security Administration, a significant portion of the water and wastewater workforce will exit the field in the next decade, depleting the pool of experienced professionals.

The challenge is not just in the numbers alone. The industry traditionally has been very good at attracting lower-skilled workers and offering training for operators and maintenance and office support personnel. The job sector, however, is changing. Advanced technologies and more complex regulatory requirements are necessitating a more skilled workforce. The retirement of experienced mentors who can train new personnel further exacerbates the problem. There also is a lack of awareness of the field in general.

The anxiety can only grow higher as both retiring workforce and aging infrastructure force utilities to make tough budget decisions in order to attract new workers.

Joseph Gutenson, environmental support specialist for the Center for Water Resource Studies at Western Kentucky University, said this problem is even more prevalent in rural areas, where operators often face lower wages, fewer benefits and more responsibilities, which cause many small town operators to seek employment with larger utilities.

Overcoming these obstacles could lead to opportunities.

The need to invest in infrastructure improvements and meet new regulatory demands with fewer people is driving automation. Automation, however, demands a skilled workforce capable of operating and managing these new technologies.

While many systems are either manually operated or semi-automated, a number of utilities are transitioning to automation and using this opportunity to attract a more skilled workforce with competitive salaries, attractive benefits packages and job stability.

According to a Black & Veatch report, in order to attract the engineers, computer specialists and instrumentation technician graduates required to operate and maintain these facilities, progressive water utilities will have to offer a challenging and exciting technical environment with access to some of the newest tools.

These obstacles and opportunities in the water and wastewater field are quickly changing the face of the industry.

I am hopeful that these changes will lead to a better public understanding of the importance of maintaining our water infrastructure, not only by implementing the latest technologies, but also by investing in a skilled workforce.

Neda Simeonova | Editorial Director | nsimeonova@sgcmail.com

Follow w&wd



<http://on.fb.me/ZgBbCD>



<http://linkd.in/10W6uOi>



<http://bit.ly/1acvntx>



@WWDmag

W&WD 2014 State of Industry Report

Water & Wastes Digest's latest State of the Industry Report will be featured in the December issue. Be sure to visit www.wwdmag.com for more information and highlights from the 2014 report.



WATER & WASTES DIGEST

3030 W. Salt Creek Lane | Suite 201 | Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025
847.298.6622 | F: 847.390.0408 | www.wwdmag.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editorial Director Neda Simeonova
Managing Editor Elisabeth Lisican
Associate Editor Kate Cline
Associate Editor Mary Beth Nevulis
Associate Editor Amy McIntosh
Associate Editor Williette Nyanue
Designer Robin Hicks

ADVERTISING & SALES

7150 E. Camelback, Suite 325 | Scottsdale, AZ 85251
480.941.0510 | F: 480.423.1443

Integrated Media Consultant David Rairigh
drairigh@sgcmail.com | 480.941.0510 x25

Integrated Media Consultant Celeste Scarfi-Tellez
cscarfi@sgcmail.com | 831.703.4345

Integrated Media Consultant Bill Black
bblack@sgcmail.com | 267.483.8788

Classified Sales Manager Donna Aly
daly@sgcmail.com | 480.941.0510 x13

Reprint Coordinator Adrienne Miller
amiller@sgcmail.com | 847.391.1036

List Rental Contact Geoffrey Gardner
geoffrey.gardner@reachmarketing.com | 845.201.5331

Advertising Coordinator Erica Rivera
erivera@sgcmail.com | 847.391.1049

MANAGEMENT

Vice President/Group Publisher Dennis Martyka
dmartyka@sgcmail.com | 480.941.0510 x19

Associate Publisher Greg Tres
gtres@sgcmail.com | 480.941.0510 x15

Sr. Vice President Rick Schwer

Sr. VP Data Development Joel Hughes

VP of Content & Custom Media Diane Vojcanin

VP Events Harry Urban

Director of Audience Development Doug Riemer

Marketing Director Michael Porcaro

Manager of Editorial & Creative Services Lois Hince

CORPORATE

Chairperson K.S. Gillette

President/CEO E.S. Gillette

Sr. Vice President A. O'Neill

Sr. Vice President, CFO Dave Shreiner

Chairman Emeritus H.S. Gillette (1922-2003)

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Jeff Eger HDR

Dr. John Rowe Okefenokee Technical College

Paul Rice Evoqua Water Technologies LLC

Tom Mills Severn Trent Services

Andy Richardson Greeley & Hansen LLC

Chuck Reading REACO Associates LLC

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Water & Wastes Digest (W&WD) is published exclusively for the 80,000+ decision makers in the municipal and industrial water, wastewater and water pollution industries. These individuals actively design, specify, buy, operate and maintain the equipment, chemicals and services used for water treatment. Editorial content in this audited publication highlights new products and technologies concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. A product directory is included in the annual June Buyer's Guide.

SCRANTON GILLETTE COMMUNICATIONS' INFRASTRUCTURE TEAM



W&WD (ISSN 0043-1141) is published monthly by Scranton Gillette Communications Inc., 3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201, Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025. The U.S. subscription rates are \$45 per year; single copies are \$6; single copies of the June Buyer's Guide are \$10. Foreign subscription rates are \$95 payable in U.S. currency. Reproduction of contents forbidden. Copyright 2014. Periodical postage paid at Arlington Heights, IL 60005 and additional mailing offices.

W&WD accepts no responsibility or liability for the validity of information supplied by contributors, vendors, advertisers or advertising agencies.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Circulation Department

W&WD
3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025

PRINTED IN USA

