

TEEX Tackles the ‘Graying’ of the Water/Wastewater Industry



Science · Engineering · Technology · Health

In Texas, the water and wastewater industry is aging – its plants, infrastructure, operators and maintenance technicians.

Steve Ash, TEEX Water/Wastewater (WWW) Training Manager, calls it the “graying of the industry,” explaining that the “Boomers are retiring and the Zoomers either aren’t aware of the WWW field, or may be reluctant to try a WWW career.”

He adds that the problem is compounded exponentially in small-town Texas, where the likelihood of a water main break or a well maintenance issue has a more profound impact. Small towns are struggling to find and keep skilled and licensed water system operators. When aging infrastructure fails, it can quickly overwhelm a town’s utility workers.

One way that TEEX aims to help solve the “graying” challenge is by promoting the Water/Wastewater industry to high schoolers through the Science, Engineering, Technology and Health (SETH) Project.

The SETH Project is Texas’ first-ever training course designed to provide high school students with everything they need to know to become a licensed water operator.

The Texas Section of the American Water Works Association (TAWWA), utilizing TEEX’s Basic Water Operator curriculum, has developed a training program that allows high school students to launch their careers in the water utility field. TAWWA has entered into a unique licensing agreement with the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), developing training videos that utilize the industry standard for water operator training, the TEEX Basic Water Training manual.

The SETH program prepares students to take the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Class D Water Operator test. If they pass the exam, students receive a provisional license that allows them to begin working in drinking water facilities in Texas. Upon turning 18, they will receive their TCEQ Class D water license. Any school district can opt into the program at no cost to the district or the student.