

Decentralized Wastewater Workforce: Needs and Challenges

Participatory Session & Needs Assessment



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Decentralized Wastewater Workforce: Needs and Challenges

Facilitated by Alexie Rudman, Jennifer Loughran, Lauren Usilton, Alissa Cox, Maureen Thomas, Wendy Chu, Michelle Gillen

October 25th, 2023

Session Structure

1. Intros & Why this session - 10 min
2. Breakout groups - 25 min
3. Quick share - 12 min
4. Conclusion - 3 min

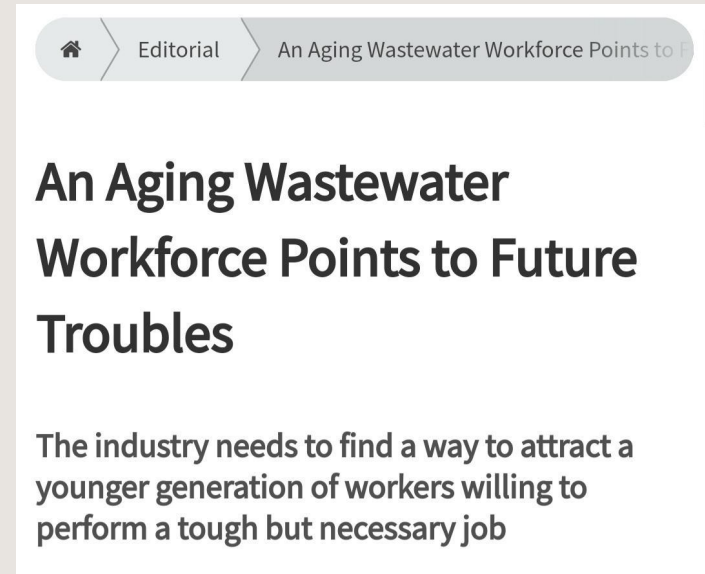
Meet your facilitators!



Top: epa.gov, Bottom: Snohomish County

Why have this session?

- A lot of septic-dependent areas in MA
 - Capacity for management & enforcement could be bolstered
- Demand for decentralized wastewater jobs is high
- Aging workforce & infrastructure
- Water pollution crisis - solutions need to be implemented
- No regional groups w/ specific decentralized focus
 - Similarities and differences with centralized WW sector
- The timing is **right**- regulatory changes and funding opportunities



The screenshot shows a breadcrumb trail: Home > Editorial > An Aging Wastewater Workforce Points to Future Troubles. The article title is "An Aging Wastewater Workforce Points to Future Troubles". The sub-headline reads: "The industry needs to find a way to attract a younger generation of workers willing to perform a tough but necessary job".



The screenshot shows the EPA website header with the logo and "United States Environmental Protection Agency". A search bar contains "Search EPA.gov". Navigation links include "Environmental Topics", "Laws & Regulations", "Report a Violation", and "About EPA". The news release title is "Biden-Harris Administration Announces Availability of \$20 Million in Grants to Create Career Opportunities in the Water Workforce". The date is "September 25, 2023". A "CONTACT US" link is visible in the top right.

Session Goals

1. Identify if decentralized **workforce development (WD)** is a priority across MA
2. Identify more specific needs and challenges
3. Collectively identify which organizations could have a role in spearheading a regional collaborative on decentralized WD

Session Output

1. Short report shared back with you through MHOA
2. Momentum and (hopefully) a collaborative of groups working on Decentralized WD



credit: URI's NEOWTP

Just a few example WD needs & challenges

- Recruiting
 - Recruiting younger generation
 - Diversity
 - Lack of exposure to DW industry
 - Value shift?
- (Re)training
 - Equipped with right skills?
 - Evolution of tech & regulation
 - Capacity to offer (re)training
- Other challenges/needs
 - Housing availability/access
 - Public perception/ stigma of WW jobs
 - Water as undervalued
 - Different learning strategies

Figure 1: Decentralized Career Pathways



From EPA Report https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/documents/career-pathways_report.pdf

Group Discussion

25 mins to answer three questions, including question 5

Appoint a note-taker as well as a speaker to summarize

Please take detailed notes on sheets provided

Facilitators to help with questions

Please respect ground rules

Session Questions

1. What workforce needs and challenges do you confront in your profession, organization, or daily life?
 - a) Can you share a specific example or two?
 - b) What specific types of jobs are much needed in the OWTS sector, both short and long term?
2. What resources would help you excel or grow in your field of work? What resources would help you be more efficient and effective? (*informational, training, capacity, etc*)
3. Based on your experiences, what are the pros and cons of on-site wastewater jobs?
 - a) How might we better communicate/market the pros? And address some of the cons?
4. Have you/your organization implemented workforce or recruitment initiatives? What worked and what didn't? Where and how did you promote these opportunities?
5. **What organizations can help us lead a workforce effort in this sector? What could their roles in a regional Workforce Development collaborative be?**
 - a) **Who do we need to build relationships with? Who is not at the table?**
6. What workforce-related challenges/needs were not captured in this brief conversation?

Concluding Thoughts

- No single organization can tackle this
- The time to act is **now** - WD doesn't happen overnight
- We need many voices & perspectives for WD to be successful
- This is the first step... let's keep the momentum going!

Stay tuned for short summary report!



Thank you for sharing your time with us!

If you are interested in participating in a WD collaborative, continuing the conversation, or if you have any questions:

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Additional Resources

- **Training Centers:**
 - **NEIWPCC-** <https://neiwpc.org/learning-center/>
 - **URI Wastewater training program**
- <https://web.uri.edu/owt/wastewater-professionals/>
- **Work for Water New England-** <https://www.workforwater.org/states/massachusetts/>
- **Yankee Onsite Wastewater Association-** <https://www.yankeeonsite.org/>
- **EPA- Pipeline to a sustainable workforce** <https://www.epa.gov/septic/pipeline-sustainable-workforce-decentralizedonsite-wastewater-occupations>
- **EPA - Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Workforce** <https://www.epa.gov/septic/decentralized-wastewater-treatment-workforce>