



Special Points of Interest

- Funding
- Legislature
- Jennings Northwest Regional Utilities "Success" Story
- Fall Conference
- IDEM



Don't miss the 8th Annual IRSDA Conference! See page 3 for details.

Inside this issue:

The Challenge of Sewer Expansion	1
Legislative	2
Success Story	2
Fall Conference	3
Board of Directors Listing	3
A Message from IDEM	4

A Message to Members and Colleagues

by Ted Stubbs

Sharing information and support is part of the IRSDA's mission. Consistent with that mission we are publishing our first newsletter. Each year RSD's face a number of changes that impact the service we provide. Those issues have many faces some of which are legislative, financial, operational, and/or administrative in nature. This past year has been no exception and many of the current issues will be addressed in the paragraphs that follow. We ask all of

you to not only take a few minutes and read this newsletter but also encourage you to get involved in our organization. One of our biggest challenges is to familiarize everyone with the necessary and beneficial purpose RSD's serve along with the difficulties and obstacles encountered in doing so. Through your active participation everyone can better understand the variety and complexity of the issues we face. The IRSDA's Board of

Directors meets quarterly and hosts an annual conference in the fall that focuses on subjects that are current and pertinent to our profession. Thank you for considering our invitation and we hope you find this newsletter worthwhile. Your thoughts and comments would be appreciated.

The Challenge of Sewer Expansion

by Ted Stubbs

Most of the complaints legislators hear concerning RSDs have their roots in rates and charges. Unfortunately sanitary sewers tend to be one of the most important but least appreciated and most expensive of all public works. As a result, the

higher the rate the more frustrated an owner is, especially when they don't understand the importance or need of public sewers. The shrinking availability of grants and low interest loans combined with the competition for such along with increased

construction costs will only make expansion very difficult given our current economic climate. We all need to make our legislators aware that financial support is crucial to properly addressing Indiana's wastewater needs.

Legislative

by Ted Stubbs



This past legislative session saw the introduction of a number of bills that had the potential to impact each of us. On many occasions a bill is introduced that, in spite of its good intentions, creates the potential for more problems than the issue it was written to address. That was the case with Senate Bill 213. The Bill was ultimately withdrawn but we feel an explanation of why the

IRSDA opposed it is needed. This is only a brief summary of our position. The complete explanation can be found on our website: www.irsd.org. The bill's intent was to require a water utility located in the same service area as a RSD, whose customer base was less than 350, to disconnect service to their customer if they were in arrears on their sewer bill. It also fixed the period for assessing penalties at 60 days. We opposed this bill for the following reasons:

1. IC 13-26 currently gives boards the ability to fix the time that penalties are assessed.
2. The bill was size specific and we feel whenever possible legislation such as this should not exclude anyone.
3. Requiring one utility to become involved

in the business of another would not be fair, just or equitable not to mention the added workload and problems that would be created for the water utility.

4. The health department certification did not have clear guidelines for what constitutes "endangering the health of the user and others".

Other Bills that were introduced this past session that did not become law but may be reintroduced next year include eliminating a district's ability to exercise the power of eminent domain, forbidding districts to file liens for nonpayment on properties not occupied by the owner and revisiting the accountability question of district board of trustees. As in the past, the IRSDA will offer to work with the legislature on any subject that pertains to wastewater.

JNRU: "Success is a journey measured one day at a time"

by Jeffery Fish

The Jennings Northwest Regional Utilities, commonly referred to by its acronym "JNRU", has rarely, if ever, been identified (or recognized) as a "success" in the world of regional sewer districts (RSDs). The *simple* reason for this is that once JNRU was formed, a little over ten years ago, JNRU didn't communicate well with the public. Patience and better communication skills could have united the community rather than dividing it over planned improvement projects, which is what put JNRU on the map as an RSD with some of the most difficult problems being faced among RSDs in the State of Indiana.



JNRU's problems revolved around plans to expand sewers out into the County and building a new wastewater treatment plant (WWTP); both of which spent years entangled with litigation among its customers and other governmental agencies within the county. Construction funds were spent on litigation rather than the new infrastructure and no new customers were added to help repay new debt. To further complicate matters, the WWTP design was flawed and process tanks began to freeze in the winter and became

damaged and unusable. IDEM eventually put the WWTP and the original collection system under an "Agreed Order" demanding repairs. *(Still not sounding very successful, well it gets better.)*

JNRU completed four separate preliminary engineering reports (PERs) that address existing sewer problems and needs for sewer expansion. None of these plans are financially feasible for our customers, which has taken JNRU's board to the point of threatening to resign unless they receive some form of financial assistance. The JNRU board collectively passed a resolution in 2007 setting their resignation date as March 1, 2008. Afterwards, they developed a transition plan for the continued operation of the District and put everyone on notice that the State and/or County would be running the District if JNRU didn't receive some form of financial assistance. As a result, our State Representative asked the board to postpone their resignations long enough to meet with him and other officials. Thereafter, a meeting with State, County, and local community officials was arranged by our State Representative in an effort to work through project needs, development and funding alternatives. But, JNRU's circumstance was so critical that serious consideration was being given to dissolving the District or changing the name rather than correcting the problems and expanding sewers; this may seem contradictory, but everything is literally on the table. Communication within this plan-

ning group appears positive and a solution in one form or another seems evident, but JNRU is obviously, and literally, a fine historical example of "starting off on the wrong foot".

As overwhelming as it may seem (*and is at times*), the current staff and board have spent the past eight years working on recovery. Our success, given these extraordinary circumstances, is not in that we have eliminated the excessive debt (*because we haven't*) or repaired all of the problems with the WWTP or the original collection system (*again, because we haven't*), but in our ability to persevere with a new board and staff that has far exceeded many people's expectations. We have done this by building and training a qualified staff of office and field personnel, providing them with the tools and equipment they need to perform their work, and improved the operation of the WWTP and antiquated collection system. But most of all, we have greatly improved our relationships with our customers and other governmental entities in the County and State. Ultimately, our success is measured each day as we gain our customers trust and support; and building communication skills at every level in the organization is essential to every RSD's success story.

Fall Conference

The 8th Annual IRSDA Conference will be held on October 27th at the Ritz Charles in Carmel, Indiana. It starts at 8:00 a.m. and is packed with many important issues that regional sewer districts face each day. We have great speakers and representatives from important agencies that we rely on such as IDEM, State Board of Accounts, Indiana State Department of Health, USDA Rural Development, SRF, Indiana Rural Economic Development and more. We also have great exhibitors with displays of their services or supplies. The exhibitors play a major role in the success of this conference due to their knowledge and experience with various regional sewer districts.



The IRSDA conference is especially beneficial to Superintendents, Board members and staff because it gives them an opportunity to share information such as; policies, insurance coverage, ordinances, employee benefits and day-to-day operations. We hope that you will plan to attend this very informative conference. Just go to www.irsda.org and click on the 2008 Conference link. Registration and Sponsorship forms are available online.

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A Message from IDEM

The IDEM website offers information about wastewater compliance assistance, including:

An overview of the wastewater operator certification program, the wastewater operator certification application, information on how wastewater operators can ensure that they keep their certification status, and IDEM contact information. Visit <http://www.in.gov/idem/5145.htm>.

A listing of IDEM wastewater inspectors who are available to assist operators with proper maintenance and operation techniques as they also work to assure facilities comply with permits and Clean Water Act requirements, and investigate complaints from the public. For a map of wastewater inspection areas and contact information, visit <http://www.in.gov/idem/5089.htm>.

IDEM wastewater compliance programs include:

On-site, hands-on assistance to wastewater treatment plant operators and facilities through the IDEM Operator Assistance Group. The Operator Assistance Group also encourages the involvement of community elected officials in the operation of wastewater treatment plants. For information, wastewater operators and local officials should contact Kevin Green with IDEM's Office of Water Quality at (317) 696-2134 or kgreen@idem.IN.gov.

Technical assistance with test methods and other laboratory issues for individuals involved with laboratory sampling. For information, contact Barbara McDowell with IDEM's Office of Water Quality at (317) 233-6464 or bmcdowel@idem.in.gov.



IDEM toll-free number and emergency hot lines:

Business Office:

(800) 451-6027

Emergencies:

(888) 233-7745

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