

FRWA Attends NRWA Emergency Response Training

Mark Hallett

FRWA Energy Efficiency Technician

Happy Friday Rural Water! It's the middle of May and boy are things heating up already. This summer is going to be a hot one. As we all know, a warm summer leads the way to an active storm season. Are you prepared?

FRWA attended the National Rural Water Emergency Response Training held in Lonoke, AK this past week. The event was the largest it had been ever, 128 attendees representing 33 states. This training is an annual training that provides tips, suggestions, and strategies to Rural Water Associations on how to help respond during an emergency. In addition to the training, hands on technical displays are held to ensure that responders can help deploy and retrieve equipment in the field. This year's training featured stations on vac-trucks, generator repair and maintenance, VFD installation and maintenance, and field communication technology.

In addition to receiving training, FRWA also provided some training and presented about the response to Hurricane Michael. Many attendees were awed by the destructive force of Michael. They were moved by the response efforts. They were amazed that the recovery was still in progress. The experience of Michael helped teach that while responding immediately to an emergency is necessary, water and wastewater systems will still need support as the recover.

Arkansas Rural Water Association (ARWA), the hosts of the training, also shared stories about emergency response. They were quite proud of their response to the recent flooding in their area, which affected many small wastewater systems. Flooded lift stations led to SSOs, which needed to be contained and cleaned up. ARWA recently invested in more equipment to help respond during emergencies including a vac-truck and two new generators. They recalled their response to Michael and their help to the City of Lynn Haven. They touched on how prepared the system was with bypasses at their lift stations, and also warned to come with every adapter and fitting you can. The lessons they learned helped other associations understand the need for more equipment.

Overall this training was a great success and our Circuit Riders and staff that attended greatly enjoyed it. It makes us better able to respond to your needs during an emergency event. It also raises awareness for others to ensure that their state is ready for when emergencies come.

As storm season approaches once again, we urge our members to dust off their Emergency Response Plans (ERPs) and update them as necessary. Make sure emergency contacts numbers are up to date, including but not limited to employees, chemical providers, and electricians. Make sure your employees understand their role(s) during an emergency: Who is going to take care of lift stations? Who will make sure generators are fueled? How will you communicate if phone and internet services are interrupted? Where will you meet to discuss the daily needs of your system? Do you know where to report SSOs and BWNs?

A template for ERPs can be found on our website at <https://www.frwa.net/emergency-response-information.html>. Also keep an eye out for Emergency Response Training we will be holding later this year, more details to come.

In addition to these wonderful resources, make sure to check out FlaWARN (at flawarn.org); FlaWARN is a system for utilities to help utilities during emergencies. Also make sure your utility is familiar with StormTracker, DEP's system for reporting needs and responses during an emergency event. It can be found at <https://stormtracker.dep.state.fl.us/login.asp>.