

Executive Summary

CWEA October Planning Meeting, 2005 October 6, 2005 ~ Martinez (CCCS)

Overview

Thirty-four CWEA leaders met on October 6, 2005 to provide input for three key steps in CWEA's strategic planning process:

1. Assumptions about the relevant future
2. Program assessment for Certification, Training, Publications
3. Mega-issue: What is the most effective way to motivate agency management to champion CWEA certification and training and require these programs for their employees?

CWEA's Planning & Program Development Committee and Board will use this input, along with market research from the member needs survey that launches in November 2005, as they work on these elements of CWEA's strategic planning process in the coming year. This Executive Summary captures the key points made during the daylong workshop.

1. Assumptions about the Relevant Future--Input

The planning group reviewed the 60 assumptions about the future in CWEA's strategic plan and identified the following 16 as key assumptions that will have an impact on the profession and the association in the next 1-2 years.

Science and Technology

1. Technological advances in communication will increase members' expectations about when, where, and how they can access CWEA products, services, staff, and leaders.
2. Technology will continue to improve, and the profession will require more technical expertise of its professionals.
3. The increase in sophistication of technology and the ability to detect more pollutants will lead to more stringent regulations, and the laboratory, regulatory, treatment technology cycle will continue.
4. Advances in science and technology in other industries will be increasingly important to monitor and assess for their impact and potential application to the wastewater industry.

Demographic and Social

1. Retirement (aging workforce) crunch will hit in 5-10 years with a loss of historical industry knowledge as those people retire. The current re-hiring of retired people as consultants is only a temporary fix.
2. The work ethic of the working population will continue to change, including lower value on one's professional life (and less innate interest in and loyalty to any association or agency).
3. There will be a high expectation of the younger generations that they can start at mid-level (or upper-level) positions.
4. Fewer participants and less time to participate – based on the increased emphasis on personal lives. The employers' willingness to pay for training is critical to get employees to go to training.

Work and Workplace

1. People in agencies will retire earlier to take advantage of their competitive retirement packages.
2. Operators-in-training positions will increase. Higher level certified operators will be more difficult to find. There will be more on-the-job training needs.
3. Technical vocations will continue to need basic skills training on the job, even for employees with higher education in academic and technical schools. There is a lack of minimum

knowledge for new employees to start in some areas, and a lack of desire or willingness to enter other areas (and start “at the bottom”).

Government

1. There will be new and tighter regulations with increased expectations. Detection limits and the ability to meet them (or not) will affect the reputation of the industry.
2. In the short-term, additional costs for equipment, staff time, and other resources will mean less money available for association membership, training, certification, and other services.

Economic and Business Trends

1. Employers may or may not continue to pay for & support CWEA events. Agencies have begun to look more closely at quality of training as an ROI as budgets tighten.
2. There will continue to be increasing costs for renewal, replacement and upgrade of the wastewater infrastructure, and funding will be an issue; with impacts to vary by municipality.

2. Program Assessment--Input

The planning group reviewed three key CWEA program areas—certification, training (broad-based and specialized), and publications—using condensed program assessment criteria to provide input for the Planning & Program Development Committee’s full program assessment planned for February 2006. The Committee will also use results of the member needs survey launching in November 2005 for its program assessment work. The group provided thinking on how each program rated in three dimensions: program attractiveness, competitive position, and alternative coverage.

Certification

Program Attractiveness = High
Competitive Position = Strong
Alternative Coverage = Low

Program Attractiveness

- Has perceived value as an indication of competency and professionalism for the individual and the agency. Agencies use certification as risk-management tool.
- Meets personal need for validation/sense of professionalism and competency.
- Represents professional image, accountability, and role in protecting the environment.
- Certification helps minimize regulatory incursion. State agencies under political pressure/scrutiny. Certification shows qualified people = lever. Provides a tool to use in response to scrutiny.
- Certification is job security for employees and marketability
- Easy screen for hiring process.
- Volunteer expertise is strong/high, but volunteering for this program is dwindling.
- Attractiveness to trainers/volunteers will increase with train-the-trainer.
- Somewhat attractive to volunteers, but could be better if broken-down into more pieces to involve more people.
- Some sections have difficulty filling the TCP Chair position. Need younger people to identify what their needs/wants are.
- Potential volunteers have other commitments. Reduce meetings required.
- Volunteering for certification appears to be exclusive, elite clique-ish. Perception that volunteers need high level of knowledge to participate in exam process.

Competitive Position:

- Self-funded, as long as agencies continue to support. Support may expand as more agencies require more certification. Trend seems to be increasing support for certification.
- May be in danger as agencies don’t see need or budgets decrease. CWEA needs to show value of program
- Need to expand reputation to include managers and people not internal to CWEA.

Alternative Coverage

- CWEA is only certification program in California, except for some smaller programs for specific vocations. Outside California, there is ABC.

Training – broad-based

Includes: Annual Conference, Northern Regional Training Conference, Tri-State Seminar

Program Attractiveness = High

Competitive Position = Strong

Alternate Coverage = High/Low (the group expressed divergent opinions)

Program Attractiveness:

- Annual conference fills need for non-frontline staff, with decision-makers and purchasers.
- Northern Regional Training Conference/Tri-State fills need of more frontline staff, who influence the decision-makers.
- Need will continue – in tight budgets, not certain if support will continue.
- Other training (non-CWEA) is more expensive.
- Mixed volunteer attractiveness. Volunteers are intimidated and don't know what's involved. Not attractive to volunteer involvement. Can get more volunteers at conferences
- Volunteers producing the events represents a possible weakness for future agency support.
- Commitment of volunteers is more important than technical expertise.

Competitive Position:

- Good reputation internally and to those we are trying to attract.
- Reputation is dependent upon the quality of the programs and their focus/execution. Need new volunteers and speakers. Need to make sure people know how to train. Finding speakers is difficult for some specialties/topics (safety, etc), but not for others (engineering & research, etc).
- Agency support is dependent upon quality. As agencies cut back training in budgets it is critical to get their support.
- Need to measure effectiveness of training. How did it help you on the job?

Alternative Coverage:

- Some alternate providers with WEF, AWWA.

Training – specific/specialized

Includes: Northern Safety Conference, Northern Electrical & instrumentation Control Conference, P3S Conference (some input that this is a broad-based conference), Southern Systems Collection Systems Conference, Specialty Conferences

Program Attractiveness = High/Low (the group expressed divergent opinions)

Competitive Position = Strong/Weak (the group expressed divergent opinions)

Alternative Coverage = High

Program Attractiveness

- Need will continue in order to support a more technologically savvy workforce with more frequent and localized needs.
- Usually attracts a different audience, support will continue as long as the specialized topics remain cutting-edge.
- Not generally attractive to volunteers.

Competitive Position

- The reputation could be communicated further.
- Volunteers who are attracted are tied to other commitments (affecting resources).

Alternative Coverage

- More competition for specialty conferences.

Publications

Includes: Wastewater Professional, E-Bulletin, On-line member directory, Best practices manuals

Program Attractiveness = High/Medium/Low

Competitive Position = High /Medium/Weak

Alternative Coverage = High/Low

(The group expressed divergent opinions that varied by publication)

	Wastewater Professional	E-Bulletin	On-line member directory	Best practices manuals
Program Attractiveness	Low	Low	High	High
Competitive Position	Weak	Strong	Strong	Strong
Alternative Coverage	High	Low	High	High

Program Attractiveness

- Some publications are essential, while others have other sources and are less important.
- Need for information dissemination will continue, but question if CWEA should fulfill that need.
- Does contribute positively to image as a communication tool.
- Offers advertising – great addition and opportunities for manufacturers to provide support.
- Content is key – is it applicable to our jobs?
- *E-Bulletin* is fun, informative, and fulfills an expectation of members.
- *E-Bulletin* gets lost in the crowd.
- We have a problem with *E-Bulletin*, we read or flipped through paper version
- Wastewater Professional received very mixed reviews from our group – very technical.
- The *Wastewater Professional* should be on email vs. the *E-Bulletin*. The information is valuable and we must figure out how to give membership this information
- *Leader Link* is an effective tool for leaders and the right mix of information, professional development skills.

Competitive Position

- Articles and content are hard to get
- *E-Bulletin* has lots of competition and requires high resources

Alternative Coverage

- An opportunity for our “own” lay people to express and have published their opinions/special projects, but there are other venues for this as well.

3. Mega-Issue--Input

The group discussed the mega-issue: What is the most effective way to motivate agency management to champion CWEA certification and training and require these programs for their employees? The group was asked to give input on four knowledge-based decision-making questions:

1. What do we know about our members/stakeholders needs, wants, and preferences that is relevant to this decision? (Sensitivity to member views)
2. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our marketplace/industry/profession that is relevant to this decision? (Foresight about future environment)
3. What do we know about the capacity and strategic position of our organization that is relevant to his decision? (Insight about the organization and its relative competitive position)
4. What are the ethical implications and realities of our choices?

The following captures the dominant themes from the group's input on the knowledge-based decision-making questions.

Q1: What do we know about the needs, wants, and preferences of the following stakeholders that is relevant to this decision? (Sensitivity to member views)

About Members:

- Members value certification – when agencies support it.
- Certificate holders appreciate and respect their certificates.
- Some members are paying their own way. Some members support their own involvement.
- Training is wanted by all.
- Not all members need certification.
- A lot of members want certification and recognition from a third-party
- Priorities for training are being challenged.
- Some certification holders get paid for certification.
- Members value these programs--training or recognition of knowledge.
- Members want reimbursement, time off , etc to attend training and become certified
- Members enjoy recognition and the satisfaction of achieving certification and learning
- Members are curious to learn how others do the same job.
- Need to keep programs and conferences fresh – avoid burnout of attendant

About Agencies:

- Management doesn't mind people learning how to do a better job, but doesn't necessarily want to pay for training or higher salaries.
- Management and employees don't know what we offer.
- Employers have budget and resources constraints (travel, training, certification)
- Reluctance by agencies to commit to requiring training and certification because they must follow-up on it (with money for certification and training, and staff time).
- Agencies cover the spectrum from enthusiasm (require/reward certification, pay for and provide work-time for training) through indifference to hostility with regard to support for training and certification of their employees.
- Agencies prefer a professional workforce (some do, some don't)
- Industry wants "baseline" and competency testing in different occupations.
- Regulatory issues become a DRIVER for agencies to train.
- Employers need to attract and retain qualified staff.
- Managers need some motivation to change their level of support for CWEA
- Agency wants to see benefits and need a compelling reason to support CWEA.
- Demographics – new managers – CWEA friendly
- Employees want employers to pay for both training and certification.
- Agencies having trouble raising rates – public doesn't understand the process (of wastewater treatment) and why it costs money.
- We don't know who currently champions training and certification
- Agency management probably does not know that attendance is monitored and CEUs/contact hours are given.
- Perception CWEA is just for operators or no engineering (management component).
- We don't know the degree to which the managers see the value of the training and certifications.
- More agencies requiring certification in job descriptions (don't know how many)
- Some agencies require presentation/synopsis of what learned, train others.
- State agencies are under increased political pressure/scrutiny. Certification can be a response to scrutiny. Certification shows qualified people = lever.
- Agencies use certification as an easy screen in the hiring process.
- Certification is job security and marketability for employees
- Agencies need to justify the cost of certification and training
- Encina's JPA and IRWD are poster children for support of certification.
- It helps when the GM is a past president of CWEA.
- Not all agencies want to be approached in the same way.

- Agencies recognize need for training, but not that training is high benefit.

Q2: What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our marketplace/industry/profession that is relevant to this decision? (Foresight about future environment)

Demographics and Social

- Retirement boom is here – causing loss of institutional knowledge.
- Population will grow.
- Will need replacements for retirees, who will need skills to get certified
- As workforce becomes younger, training will be needed.
- New managers may or may not be supportive.
- Retirees – fewer champions but more training demand.
- Requiring certification will decrease the pool of candidates for agencies.
- Shrinking pool of workers –added requirement of certification may shrink the pool further
- Public (rate-payer) perception is:
 - » I turn the tap and the clean water comes out
 - » I flush and it goes away
 - » There is no excuse (zero-tolerance) for error.
 - » Members are working the “only job you could get.”
 - » Agencies need to justify the cost of certification and training.
- Public awareness will increase

Government (Regulatory)

- Increasing regulation and regulatory oversight (State & Federal)
- More regulation requiring more certification (CMOM, ELAP)
- There already is some talk of making collection system workers get certified through a state operated recognized program.
- Increasing regulations (ELAP, RWQCB) are requiring certificates or bachelor’s degrees
- Opportunity and need to work more with regulators; increase credibility and standing with regulatory board and in turn that could convince agencies of the value
- State-sponsored certification is in trouble.
- Need will increase to be able to demonstrate qualification to comply with regulations.

Work and Workplace

- Agencies vary in size and resources
- Demonstrate competent workforce
- Agency decision for O&M based on professional knowledge
- Increasing regulatory oversight makes it attractive to have a workforce that demonstrates competency in their respective field of work.
- Budgets are TIGHT, and so training is the first “extra” to be cut.
- Not ALL employees/employers are AWARE of training.
- Resources will remain scarce or may diminish.
- Improved skill sets will be needed.
- Change in management staff and demographics – new younger managers coming in – could be good or bad (better or worse).
- Staffing is reduced, so employees are not allowed time away from job for training.
- State funded certification having problems (with budget struggles)
- There is a shortage of operators who are willing to be certified above a grade 3, because of the personal liability associated with higher grade levels.
- Different types of expertise needed depending on agency, e.g. SSOs, effluent.

Science and Technology

- More technology, making jobs change.
- Increases in technology and complexity will require added training and possibly new certifications
- Internet training means less travel.

- o Biology is the same, but technology changes.

Marketplace

- o Recycled water issue will be big.
- o Training will continue to be needed.

Q3: What do we know about the capacity and strategic position of our organization that is relevant to his decision? (Insight about the organization and its relative competitive position)

- Members have connection to agencies – there is some capacity to develop & a potential strategic position. Helps when GM is a CWEA member/Past President.
- We have a reputation as a grassroots organization (we are not WEF).
- We have the potential to develop the capacity through existing members.
- We are in the strategic position to do this as we are the premiere organization in the state.
- We aren't in a position to do this alone--work with CASA, Tri-TAC, EMS Agencies, and unions. Work with SWRCB, RWQCB staff and partner with them.
- May lack resources to work directly with agency staff
- Volunteers may be discouraged from “cheerleading” to other agencies.
- Volunteer “burnout” time constraints and commitments.
- Strong strategic position from technical perspective.
- High cost of living may cause drop in membership for these in agencies who don't pay – less members, less money.
- Best certification program
- Good training programs
- Good volunteer base
- Only wastewater professional organization in California.
- We may not be well positioned to interact with management. Management is not in our membership, go to CASA.
- Our capacity to track ROI is very limited.
- CWEA has the capacity to manage the program. It's not well positioned to politic a state mandated requirement, nor is it positioned to “arm-twist” agencies. CASA is a better association for this.
- CWEA's “flexibility” in providing training, online, anytime.
- Perception CWEA is just for operators or no engineering (management component).

Q4: What are the ethical implications and realities of our choices?

- Self-serving: come buy MY certification and MY training and join US.
 - o Make sure that there is intrinsic value to CWEA membership and certification so we can encourage participation in good faith.
 - o Goal should never be to get members just to make more money.
 - o Don't lose our core beliefs in pursuit of financial success.
- Better if State could help with program support
- Responsive to public demands clean water.
- Some people in existing positions may eventually lose their jobs if they are unable to pass the exams.
- We may have people leave the industry during a time where there is already a lack of staffing because certification is required.
- The state of CA may take the whole program over – the public may start clamoring for licensing as the line between wastewater and water begin to blur even more in the future.
- It increases the value of the profession, more money/more prestige for certificate holders.
- Need to respect that agencies need to raise their rates, but the public is not willing to because of lack of knowledge. CWEA needs to help educate the public.
- Need to respect employers' resources, needs, culture, and practices.
- Recognize differing needs of employees and members.
- Need criteria for return on investment (ROI)

- TCP ethical process increases ethics.
- Need to answer the following before moving forward:
 - Should trainers be involved with the certification program?
 - Should the industry regulate itself with its own certification program?
 - How much educational and training support should CWEA offer to those taking tests and/or getting continuing education?
 - Push on agencies or individuals? Can “push” too hard on agencies.
 - Look to members – i.e. must be certified to be a member. - Should membership be tied to certification?
 - Possible discrimination? English not primary language, but we offer English-only training and certification.

Moving from what we **know** about the issue at hand to what we might **possibly do** about the issue, the group considered the pros and cons of the following three strategy options to address the mega-issue and to identify other possible strategy options:

1. CWEA continues the status quo.
2. CWEA develops and coordinates an outreach program that goes directly to agency management to inform and educate them about the value and benefits of CWEA certification and training.
3. CWEA develops a program that empowers CWEA members to inform and educate agency management about the value and benefits of CWEA certification and training.
4. To Be Determined—identify other strategies

The following captures the dominant themes from the group’s input on the strategy options.

Option 1: CWEA continues the status quo.

Pro

- We know how to do it, as it’s already being done/Easy.
- No extra time and resources.
- Predictable
- Worked in the past, so it might continue in the future.
- We’re already over capacity in certification.

Con

- Unlikely to lead to success – doesn’t work/no benefit.
- Doesn’t move us towards the Big Audacious Goal.
- May make the situation worse.
- May require more staff time as we continue to grow.

Option 2: CWEA develops and coordinates an outreach program that goes directly to agency management to inform and educate them about the value and benefits of CWEA certification and training.

Pro

- Have access to agency decision-makers through Tri-TAC, League of Cities, and CASA
- Peer-to-Peer discussion could be effective
- Limited audience which allows a focused presentation/program
- CWEA would be the central focus and would have control and more guarantee of a consistent message
- Agencies prefer to listen (pay more attention) to outsiders (rather than their own staff).
- Inform those with “purse strings” (target audience) directly
- Best one-on-one opportunity to reach managers and gain information on why they don’t pay/play
- Could hit agency’s specific needs and hot buttons, but that will cost more.
- Ability to pool resources.
- Non-adversarial

- CWEA had good reputation and an open door to meet with management
- Increases trust
- Members would value us approaching their management – for CWEA to champion their interest.
- CWEA gets good PR

Con

- More credibility with managers if approach comes from their staff.
- Impacts are likely to take lots of time - may need to be ongoing or on cycle.
- Uses more resources to accomplish – may need additional staff
- Could lose representation or involvement of volunteers
- May not address issues in specific agency
- Potential to be one-way communication
- Could be seen as self-serving & have a negative impact on our image.
- Agencies that already pay for dues could be upset about being asked to spend more money.
- Potentially lose personal touch of industry person giving presentation & lose touch with members.
- Certificate holders not informed or utilized
- Reach small groups vs. amount of effort
- Large portion of target audience is retiring, might be a “waste” of time
- Loss of personal touch
- Makes us a special interest group.
- May not get results
- Potential conflicts and restrictions for volunteers doing presentations to other agencies
- Hard to justify
- Alienate people by being too aggressive.
- Requires development of adaptable outreach.
- More effective Public Works Directors, etc.
- Could affect image of CWEA – as self-serving and corporate image
- Hard to connect with enough agencies – resources
- CWEA is not a good PR organization.

Suggestions if Selected

- Utilize opportunity for two-way communication (don't just give presentation, get information on their needs, etc). We assume we know the problem but we have a data gap unless structured differently for feedback loop
- Take advantage of our connection with CASA, League of Cities (Tri-TAC).
- Research first – needs to be site-specific..
- Determine specific strategy pro/cons for consideration/approval before implemented.

Option 3: CWEA develops a program that empowers CWEA members to inform and educate agency management about the value and benefits of CWEA certification and training.

Pro

- Relatively low cost
- Takes advantage of institutional “marketing”
- Better access to agencies and key decision-makers (than other alternatives)
- If agencies listen to outsiders, CWEA members at other agencies could share/provide the personal stories and local section focus.
- Members can sell to their own agencies:
 - » Can be tailored and site-specific because member knows the agency (needs, politics, interests, etc)
 - » Staff may be able to better explain the specific benefit of a training class, certification, or just membership to managers.
 - » Management will recognize input from their own employees.
- Educating potential
- More people involved
- Better access to decision-makers

- o Strength in numbers and repeated messages
- o If whole membership were to be enthusiastic and took it to management it would be a positive.
- o Probably less expensive than choice 2.
- o Can be very site-specific/tailored.
- o Management would know members want to do this.
- o Higher quality

Con

- o Members may experience peer pressure to maintain status quo and be reluctant to approach management to require more training/certification.
- o Material would be more generic than if tailored to agency management
- o Careful who is carrying the message – for consistency and accuracy (no claims that CWEA can't support)
- o Agencies will think the members don't really know.
- o No access to DECISION makers.
- o Asks members to be salesman
- o Less persuasive to manager if it comes from staff
- o Could jeopardize jobs or relationship with management (manager vs. worker)
- o May not be cost effective due to size of target group.
- o Members may not be good educators.
- o Cost to train members
- o Required time and money from members.
- o Relies on members to be motivated, take initiative, ability to be persuasive and savvy to hot to address needs.
- o Union conflicts - Management/union perceptions.
- o Management might think this is self-serving on employees' parts (want to go to party).
- o Could only get to plant manager level, not plant works level.
- o Retiree cruise-control
- o Not enough certificate holders at agency to make the approach.
- o May be perceived as self-serving to CWEA.
- o Probably not feasible without #2.

Suggestions if Selected

- o Determine best strategy:
 - Have all members at the agency make the pitch (at their own agency).
 - Have members from other agencies make the pitch peer-to-peer.
- o Be careful of the relationship between unions and management.

Other possible strategy options:

1. **Combine option 2 & 3** – for access to management and official representatives efficiently.
 - o Keep grassroots image
 - o Credibility.
2. **Partner**
 - o Work with interest groups and regulators vs. agencies. (Agencies respond to regulations, but can backfire with employees who don't pass exams.)
 - o Work with the League of Cities and CASA
 - Partner with CASA, Tri-TAC, Unions, and educate
 - » Hits the folks with the purse strings
 - » Cheaper cost
 - o Outreach to managers through the League of California Cities, public works association, press, newspapers, and other.
 - » Pro = broader audience, change perception of public, research plant managers, bosses go over their heads, create a demand from above, make managers explain to bosses why they aren't participating.

- » Con = Increased potential scrutiny (newspapers), possibility of alienating existing directors that do participate – backlash of poor or annoying presentation.
- Partner with Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), etc on public outreach to help inform public of what public agencies are doing for people and environment.
- Work with SWRCB, RWQCB staff and partner with them.

3. Research before choosing strategy

- Ask agencies what they need as focus of our educational effort (we can do cert/train – what do you need in these areas & focus on quality delivery of their needs vs. focus on them requiring our training/cert)
- Survey GMs on their concerns and future needs
- Survey management to fill knowledge gap
 - » Know what's needed
 - » Get managers to be a proponent of CWEA
 - » Might not be interested in completing survey.
- Find out who is champion already
- Need to survey agencies to see what they support & what they have.
- Why some don't want certification?
- Shrinking pool of workers – will added requirement of certification shrink the pool further?
- We don't know the degree to which the managers see the value of the training and certifications. A survey of managers is needed.

4. Work with regulators to make certification a state-mandated requirement

- Interest groups/regulators to pass on regulatory mandate
 - » Agencies will have to do it
 - » Recognized as State's choice
 - » Open the door to "others" providing certification and training
 - » How to control those regulations?
 - » May end up losing people who won't or can't pass exams
- Agency needs to do it. CWEA recognized as training/certification agency.
- Opens door to more regulations.
- Lose people who can't pass.
- Similar questions were asked for operator and water distribution operator certifications.
- Would increase participation
- Would increase state regulations and bureaucracy
- CWEA becomes recognized state-approved training agency
- Same questions for operator certification and water distribution.

5. Facilitator to support strategy #3

6. Set up peer-to-peer program, e.g. GM to GM.

Other comments/Feedback:

The group provided the following additional comments and feedback:

- Invite new agency members to these or other once-a-year meeting (free dinner).
- "Watershed" planning – competitions vs. collaboration
- "Quality" training.
- Volunteer resources are scarce.
- How does this (agency support) generate good public relations or recognition by the Sierra Club, Bay Keepers, etc?
- CWEA might develop "how to" programs for agencies to develop OIT programs, not to teach operations but how to set up a training, recruitment, and retention plan in agencies/for agencies.
- Increase basic skills training.
- Person should tell boss what's been learned at CWEA training event.
- State and local section awards are important.