

MWQA News



Legislative Session Brings Disappointment to MWQA

Senator Dan Sparks of Rochester ended advancement of the Water Conditioning Bill for this legislative session by refusing a hearing in his Senate Jobs, Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. The last minute decision was a blow to the MWQA Lobbyist, Mark Haase and the MWQA Governmental Affairs Committee, as there were indications that it would be heard up to the final week. The Bill was passed out of a committee in the House in 2015. Representative Tim O'Driscoll of Sauk Rapids is the Vice Chair of that House Commerce and Regulatory Reform Committee, and O'Driscoll was a sponsor of the MWQA bill.

Ultimately all the Representatives and Senators and members of the Department of Labor and Industry who saw the value of our bill were overruled by the Minnesota Pipe Trades Association, which, with 9,000 members in the state, has veto power on these issues. This possibility was not new to our lobbyist or to our negotiating team, but three years of conversation on the bill were thought to have made reason possible. In the last days of discussion it became clear that the opposition had not communicated fully with their decision makers. They agreed to bring those people to the table sometime in the future.

Some plumbers have issues with Water Conditioning Contractors installing a water softener (or other equipment) to an existing by-pass in

small commercial settings.

In a post mortem meeting this week Bret Tangley of the MWQA's team noted his disappointment at the progress made after years of effort and considerable expense. Jeff Hill tried to put a better face on the end of the session, noting that those who speak candidly know that our legislation makes sense from top to bottom. Officials at the Department of Labor and Industry – at all levels – now know more clearly who we are and what we offer to Minnesotans. He also noted that it is generally acknowledged that Water Conditioning Contractors are those who develop the technical employees

who can service and repair water conditioning equipment. Those contractors are the ones who will be able to apply specialized expertise that is so obviously necessary in an era of growing concern about water quality and supply.

MWQA will be in discussion with the Department of Labor and Industry about the industry's next steps. DLI knows of the need for a method to register and train new installers, and DLI better understands the water conditioning function in designing and repairing equipment.

Thank you to all of those who have supported, through generous donations, MWQA's continuing efforts on these issues.

MWQA Convention Set For October 12-13 in Lakeville

MWQA will return to the Holiday Inn in Lakeville, Minnesota, for the 2016 annual convention. The event will include several seminars to help you earn your credit for your Minnesota license. The event includes a vendor fair, WQA testing and Modular Education Program seminar, and an opportunity to learn more about the industry from the Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry. DOLI has been invited to speak at the event.

Minnesota Statutes require that all persons holding Plumbing, Water Conditioning Journeyman or Master licenses must attend classes to obtain credits (CEU) prior to renewing a license. All water conditioning masters and journeymen licensees must take 4 hours of approved continuing education during each license period, beginning with the 2015 renewal period. At least 2 hours must pertain to technical topics related to water conditioning installation and servicing, and 2 must pertain to the Minnesota statutes and rules relating to water conditioning.

If you have not obtained your credit and your license expires in 2016, you can get all the credit you need by attending this year's convention.

Thanks to Everyone for Financial Support

By Mike Herman, MWQA President

Here we are through May already. Where has the year gone? If you are like me it seems like only last week we were celebrating New Years! Much has transpired during these first five months of the year, and many here at MWQA have been very busy.

MWQA's major focus was our initiative to get language into a bill and in front of this past legislative session. Many thanks to Brett Tangley and Jeff Hill, who spearheaded this effort by investing many hours meeting with our legal advisor and various labor representatives as well as with officials from the Department of Labor. Many hours, as well as significant funds, were invested in this initiative; unfortunately MWQA did not get the opportunity to have the proposal heard at the committee level. Please read the update presented from our Governmental Affairs team. Though disappointing, we

will continue to look for ways in which we can protect and further our cause as Water Conditioning/Treatment professionals.

The Convention Committee has already begun planning the agenda for MWQA's 2016 convention in October. Continuing Education Classes will be offered to provide our members with all the required continuing education units needed for maintaining state license(s). Plan now to attend, and be on the lookout for more information regarding the upcoming convention!

In closing I would like to thank everyone for their contributions towards the MWQA legal fund as well as your support of our membership. If you have questions or wish to attend a monthly meeting, just reach out to Lori, any Board member, or visit www.MWQA.com for information.

See Defeat as a Call for Professionalism

By Jeff Hill

While the defeat in the Minnesota Legislature is a stunning disappointment, it should be seen in part as a call for renewed professionalism by the industry. We have raised our profile and claimed our professionalism loudly. We have spoken to many people of our WQA training and certifications and our expertise.

So is it true – everywhere and at all times? At a recent meeting with the Minnesota Department of Health Sanitarians, Scott Schiesser (Culligan Northfield) and Jeff Hill (Robert B. Hill Co.) were asked about the high percentage of non-complying air gaps. Even though all of the facilities inspected by this group should be plumber installed, some are no doubt installed or serviced by water conditioning contractors or building owners. Since water contractors are the ones to maintain this equipment, it falls to us to correct our errors or point out the need for repair to the building owner.

Bacterial contamination remains the most serious threat to health from water, and air gaps are the most significant part in preventing bacterial contamination. Hundreds of thousands of people are reported sickened in the United States each year by microorganisms in water. But if one home or one school has a few cases, it may be dismissed as stomach flu or poor food preparation. Don't assume that it hasn't happened in facilities that you service. Adding to the difficulty, building owners will not be receptive to "unnecessary" repairs, or to complying with

a code they think unnecessary. It is up to the water conditioning contractor to be knowledgeable about public health and to explain the urgency. Installation and maintenance of air gaps is a perfect starting point and a perfect signal to others about a firm's commitment to professionalism.

Prodding our unlicensed competitors to fall in line should also be on our radar. MWQA has been very helpful in steering one-man operations down the path of training and licensing, and we need more of that. There have been a lot of good businesses that began one day when someone decided to sell and install water softeners after work, and they started the next day. Those days have passed. (The Star Tribune reported that the amount of licensed businesses is now up to 25% from 5% in 1950, and, yes, leaders from Paul Ryan to President Obama have recently called licensing protectionism –preventing low income people from starting a business.

<http://www.startribune.com/from-eyelash-extensions-to-breastfeeding-consultants-minnesota-looks-at-new-licenses/376910381/>.

But we live in 2016 –water conditioning is becoming very specialized – and it does impact public health. We need to set a high standard and we can. Be the best, and prod your unlicensed competitors when you see them in the coffee shop to use Lori at MWQA to assist them in obtaining the proper licensing.

View Your Continuing Ed History Online

A new feature on DLI's website allows each licensee to view their own continuing education (CE) course history based on what has been reported to the agency by CE providers during the past five years.

To view the CE completion information:

- Visit DLI's online License Lookup at <https://secure.doli.state.mn.us/lookup/licensing.aspx>.
- Look up your license or certification by searching for your name or license/certification number.
- Click on "Detail" next to your record.
- Click on "View Details" next to the "CE Status" field.

• Enter your license number (including two-letter prefix) and last four SSN digits when prompted and click, "Submit."

• View all the DLI-approved CE courses that you have taken in the past five years, beginning with the most recent courses.

The results include information about each CE course you have taken including the number of hours (code vs. non-code in the case of licensees like plumbers and electricians who have a requirement that distinguishes between code and non-code related courses).

In 2012, the responsibility for reporting CE attendance shifted from the licensee

to the CE sponsor, meaning that licensees are not required to submit course completion certificates to DLI with their license renewals. If you believe that DLI's records of your CE experience are incomplete, call them at (651) 284-5031 or send an email message to DLI.license@state.mn.us.

Since Jan. 1, 2015, more than 100 plumbers and electricians have had their license or unlicensed registration suspended and monetary penalties imposed for renewing their license or registration without first completing all required continuing education (CE). Please be sure to obtain your required CE before renewing your license.

Plumbing Board Signals Strict Code Interpretation

The Plumbing Board announced two decisions that indicated their desire to apply strict and unbending adherence to our new code. Both were issues of practical alternatives to Minnesota Code 2015 - which is new and adopted from the National Uniform Plumbing Code.

The first decision involved the newly required air gaps for dishwashers. Minnesota has decided on numerous occasions that these were not necessary, but the idea slipped in this January with the UPC code. The question at hand was as to whether a dishwasher drain could be routed to a properly constructed air gap on the floor below. Since this was not mentioned in the Code, it was not allowed, the Board decided. The second issue was to allow a well contractor to run his polyethylene pipe to the pressure tank. Although this will be allowed in the

next revision of the UPC, which Minnesota is expected to adopt, this also appears headed for disapproval for now. Well contractors may be required to make an underground joint and enter the building with a pipe material approved for water distribution. The Board Chair, John Parizek, and others made a valiant case for moderation, but with little impact. MWQA believes that decisions like these are critical, because again and again they will signal to homeowners and commercial property owners the nature of the plumbing code.

We need to build respect for the Code by using it as a tool for public health and consumer protection. It is not a tool to require people to do more plumbing or to use our products.

For example, the water conditioning industry had a proud moment in 1984 in

this regard. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) inserted a proposed regulation in mortgage requirements that all homes with a very hard water supply (>10 gpg) would be required to have a water softener. WQA was involved and initially very enthusiastic - but it would have been wrong and we ultimately opposed and killed the regulation.

It must be said that we also had a selfish angle in pulling the requirement - it may have instigated a nationwide flurry of unnecessary hardness reduction plants to produce water only moderately hard (Minneapolis - St. Paul like 3 - 7 gpg). Nevertheless, the right decision was made. Call it our "America's freedom to scale your water heater" moment.



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New Plumbing Code Available

It's here: the new Minnesota Plumbing Code. The Code, which is the IAPMO 2012 Code, is available by mail. Get yours at Minnesota's Bookstore in St. Paul. The new book can be ordered on their website for \$98 at www.minnesotasbookstore.com, or you can call them at 651-297-3000 or 800-657-3757.



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This diagram illustrates the levels of donations to the legislative fund by MWQA members (and by some non-members) since 2013. We will revise this as more donations are received.