

Safeguards Wanted

Maine dealers push
for water treatment
equipment installation
licensing laws

By Kristin Muckerheide

Go to your local barbershop or salon, and the person cutting your hair is required to have a license, pointed out Dan Cote, co-owner and vice president of Aqua-Max of Maine, located in Lewiston, Maine. “But [in] water treatment, we deal with chemicals all the time. Can you imagine what effects we can have on people’s lives?” he asked.

Cote said he does not understand why those working in the water industry are not required to have a license in order to install treatment equipment that impacts the health of their customers.

Ethics Concerns

Without safeguards such as licensing in place, a lapse in ethics often occurs, creating Cote’s biggest business obstacles. “You go to people’s houses and find that the wrong equipment has been placed,” he said. “And what’s the customer going to think? ‘All you guys are a bunch of crooks.’”

Cote wants to work in an industry in which dealers are perceived by consumers as knowledgeable, licensed professionals.

He decided to make a difference. He had a meeting with Maine Gov. Paul LePage and later met with Maine Secretary of State Charles Summers, Jr., Small Business Advocate Jay Martin, Tanya Lubner and Dave Loveday of the Water Quality Assn. (WQA) and others to voice his concerns and try to work out a solution.

Cote also joined forces with fellow Maine water treatment dealers Kevin Kaserman of Dunbar Pumps in York and Eric Wilson of The Water Doctor in Bath—technically his competitors—to show that this was not an issue affecting his business alone.

A Far-Reaching Issue

Martin, who staffs the Maine Regulatory Fairness Board and also is

the first small business advocate in his state, said that Cote, Kaserman and Wilson approached him to communicate the breadth of the issue.

“They said [that] this is an issue that cuts across [the] entire industry—not just one that particularly affects one business,” Martin said. “We were seeing a definite common denominator within an industry with an interest in seeing this legislation established.”

According to Martin, the challenge in the state of Maine is that in order for dealers like Cote to be able to install the equipment, they need to have a plumbing license, and the application or permit request has to be submitted within the town where they are going to operate.

Loveday, director of government affairs and communication for WQA, agrees that this is an issue in many other states.

Just the Beginning

According to Loveday and Martin, several other states, including Texas, Michigan and Wisconsin, are already taking steps to ensure that those installing water treatment equipment are adequately trained.

Texas, Michigan, Wisconsin and California currently have licensing or certification programs in some parts of their states. Texas has a state association-run certification program that is licensed in coordination with the state government to provide specialty licenses.

“The state association has gotten its curriculum approved by the state. It’s been very successful,” Loveday said. “It’s a good way to keep people up to speed on what’s new out there and [make] sure that they’re [doing] continuing education.”

The Certified Water Specialist education provided by WQA, a voluntary certification, gives installers additional credibility.

“Education on the plumbing side is important, but education on the water

treatment side is also important, so there’s sort of a missing link here in many respects,” Loveday said.

Legislation

To communicate their concerns, Cote, Kaserman and Wilson testified in front of a Maine secretary of state hearing in February 2012. Loveday and Lubner also attended the meeting to discuss similar licensing trends occurring throughout the country.

“With the technology of these devices changing now—they’re more complicated and more technical—and the issues affecting water right now—more regulations because more contaminants are being regulated—it is important that whoever is installing must know a lot more than just how to plumb it into a pipe,” Loveday said. “They must know water chemistry [and] they must make sure the water is being tested first—making sure that they’re identifying what needs to be removed, and making sure they’re putting [in] the right products in the right way with the right technology.”

In May, Secretary of State Summers prepared a letter that went to the Maine Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development Committee, which is chaired by state Sen. Christopher W. Rector. The letter summarized the testimony of Cote, Kaserman, Wilson, Loveday and Lubner from the secretary of state hearing.

“We felt that it was important that we notified this committee in case [it] wanted to look into this [issue] and determine whether or not this was an effective licensing system to improve water quality legislation and monitoring here in the state of Maine,” Martin said.

Patience

The letter went to the committee after the 2012 legislative session had ended, so for now, those involved must

sit tight until the legislature reconvenes in January 2013.

"I feel like I'm an expectant father," Cote said. But he is not idly sitting by in anticipation of action. "We're continuing on with this; we're all discussing this with our clients," he added. "I'm not letting go; I'm fighting it. I'll be talking to legislators some more when I know who's on the committee and lobbying them."

In addition to his role with the committee, Martin said he might choose to get more involved when the time comes. He may have the opportunity to testify to the legislature on pending legislation that may impact small businesses.

Martin's decision to testify will depend on if and how the legislation is drafted and if it is particularly compelling. "It could be that we come down against it, it could be that we come down for it, or we come down neither for nor against," he said. "But you can imagine that if the legislation is effectively crafted, and we see it has merit, then we'll certainly consider the opportunity to testify in support of the legislation."

What to Expect

Cote has already taken some of the necessary steps to proceed if legislation passes. He has met with Central Maine Community College President Scott Knapp, who told Cote that he would like to be involved in the licensing program and would help set up the necessary courses to be taught at his institution.

Loveday also said he thinks that WQA would be involved in developing the curriculum, depending on what the legislation specifies. "I think we'd have to work with the state and what they would do and want, but certainly we have made the offer that if they're going to do this, that we will certainly help them," he said. "It's a very positive thing for dealers. It shows the importance of going to a certified dealer and someone who's a member of a state or national association."

Loveday presumes that other states would begin to look at implementing this type of legislation as well, because as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency continues to regulate more and more contaminants in drinking water, municipalities and customers are going to turn to point-of-use or point-of-entry systems. "And when they do that, I think the consumer and the people at the state are going to want to make sure that the people who are

working on this are trained and know what they're doing," he said.

Cote can hardly contain his enthusiasm for what is to come. "I'm excited that we're finally going some place with this, and hopefully we have started a program for everyone in this

country," he said. "If I can leave a footprint in life, I hope this is what it is—that I've initiated something that other states or other dealers can turn around and start doing." *wqp*

Kristin Muckerheide is assistant

editor for *Water Quality Products*. For more information, contact *WQP* at wqpeditor@sgcmail.com.

For more information on this subject write in 1001 on this issue's reader service card.

Omnipure Introduces Our Newest Family Member... The L-Series!

A patented keyed design and available auto shut-off make the L-Series unique!

- ✓ New Quarter Turn Design for easy change-outs.
- ✓ Available with or without auto shut-off.
- ✓ Available with vertical or horizontal 1/4" or 3/8" Quick Connect ports.
- ✓ Patented Keyed design.
- ✓ Custom Keys available
- ✓ Variety of media options available including:
 - Carbon Block
 - KDF
 - Resins
 - GAC
 - Phosphate
 - Particulate reduction
 - AquaBond™



**The Best Inline Water Filter in the World...
Pure and Simple®.**



1-800-398-0833 USA
www.Omnipure.com
sales@omnipure.com
(208) 454-2597 • FAX: (208) 454-0026
1904 Industrial Way • Caldwell, Idaho, 83605

Write in 753