

The Benefits of Belonging

PWQA puts a high value on working with legislators and other associations. From left to right, California state Sen. Joel Anderson, PWQA President Joyce Takeda and WQA Executive Director Dave Haataja pause for a photo opportunity.



By Frank DeSilva

Industry associations provide a multitude of opportunities for businesses

Most of the readers of this magazine are in a segment of the water treatment industry concerned with point-of-entry and point-of-use drinking water treatment. This market niche is supported by a prominent not-for-profit national organization as well as various regional and state organizations. There are several related organizations that water treatment professionals also may be members of, including those dealing with industrial boiler water, cooling water, groundwater, bottled water and municipal drinking water.

There are many positive aspects to being involved with these organizations. I will base my discussion on the Water Quality Assn. (WQA) membership benefits as I see them.

Credibility & Professionalism

WQA offers product and professional certification that enhances the

credibility of participating companies and individuals. On an individual basis, water professionals are tested and certified in various disciplines. Once certified, they are able to list their certification level on business cards, resumes, logos and advertisements.

This can boost confidence in consumers about the person or business they are dealing with. The education program offered by WQA is comprehensive and directly applicable to the daily tasks and responsibilities of water professionals.

From a product standpoint, WQA offers the Gold Seal program, which certifies products in accordance with industry guidelines. This American National Standards Institute-accredited program provides product approvals for drinking water treatment and related products.

Often, a customer or installation requires regulatory approval, and the WQA Gold Seal is indispensable



Takeda meets with California state Sen. Lou Correa.

to meeting these requirements and achieving success in this field. All certified products are listed on the WQA website.

WQA and other industry organizations are bound by a code of ethics that sets standards of conduct for industry members in their dealings with customers, amongst themselves,



Mike Mecca of Performance Water, Tracy Strahl of South Bay Salt Works, Mark Felton of Culligan and Pete Conaty, PWQA lobbyist, participate in a committee meeting.

with members of related industries and with the public at large.

Advocacy

For a number of years now, I have been involved with a regional association, the Pacific Water Quality Assn. (PWQA), in conjunction with WQA. Together, they have been active on the legislative and regulatory fronts to protect the rights of member companies to conduct business in the western U.S. It is safe to say that the relatively low cost of an annual membership to the national and regional organizations is worth this benefit alone.

PWQA spends two days every year in Sacramento, Calif., for Legislative Days, meeting with legislators to promote and protect the water treatment industry. This builds a positive and proactive relationship with lawmakers and has resulted in a two-way information exchange in which legislators have asked PWQA to support their new bills. This year's Legislative Days are scheduled for March 4 and 5, and all dealers are welcome to attend, even if they are not association members.

The effort does not stop there, however. The PWQA Political Action Committee is active throughout the year and stays in constant contact with the state legislature, vigilantly watching for the introduction of any new laws that may impact the water treatment market.

Additionally, the PWQA executive board responds to any attempts on the regulatory front to limit the right to do business by attending city council meetings and meeting with utility regulators whenever the talk turns to issues such as banning self-regenerating residential water softeners. At times like these, it is often beneficial to distribute the educational materials that are available showing, for example, the energy-saving benefits of soft water.

Community

Members in these industry organizations also benefit from opportunities to network with peers and customers through annual conferences and regional meetings. The conferences are opportunities for continuing education, exhibiting products, certification testing and receiving updates on the status of the marketplace. They offer the chance to interface with suppliers and make new business contacts. There also are opportunities to submit papers to become a featured speaker at an education session.

Technical resources are available on many association websites as well. The WQA website includes information on the removal of various contaminants from drinking water, especially those that are topical due to publicity in the news. It also includes a study showing the manifold benefits of water treatment for the residential or commercial customer in terms of energy, soap and chemical savings.

This type of information can help justify the need for specific water treatment approaches for customers. WQA's "Find a Water Professional" service generates leads and acts as an outreach to consumers that are in need of local information or assistance. This online membership directory encourages networking by phone or e-mail.

Several of the organizations also offer annual scholarships to qualified individuals. This is a real opportunity to give back to the community and the member companies. *wqp*

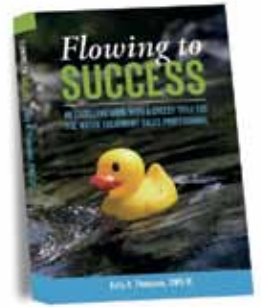
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