



SORA, VIRTUAL ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Minutes,

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

12:30 to 4:00 pm EST

12:30 – 12:40 Welcome; Member Introductions – Chuck Cousino (CO), President

Total attendees: 46

Region 1: Bruce Douglas, Amanda Clark, Rebecca Andranovich; Region 2: Steve Marshall (B); Region 3: Lance Gregory (B); Marcia Degen (Secretary); Annamaria DeSanctis, Travis Sterner (Past President); Region 4: Chris Edwards (B); Robin Mack, Adam Massey, Jason Goff, Christie Watkins, Debby Tipton, Marcelo Jose Blanco; Region 5: Mike Mettler, Kyle Bianco, Tanya Rule, Greg Graves, Matthew Janzen; Region 6: Michael Broussard (Treasurer), Nicholas Huber (Vice President), Kambridge Stevens; Region 7: Karie Duensing, Tricia Scott; Region 8: Lana Schmidt, Chuck Cousino, Dana Brekhus, Elizabeth Tokach Duran; Region 9: Kyle Uptergrove; Region 10: None. Canada: Derek Smith (MB); Tribal: Chris Sams

Captains: Greg Graves (Norweco), Mary Christine Belanger (Premier Tech), Kyle Dierolf (Premier Tech), Jim King (Eljen), Daniel Westrich (Biomicrobics), Dave Lentz (Infiltrator), Jeannie Allen (Infiltrator), Dick Bachelder (Infiltrator), Sheryl Ervin (Infiltrator).

Eric Casey, SORA Executive Director; Allison Blodig –NOWRA; Christopher LeClair – NOWRA; Heidi Faller – EPA; Zack Lowenstein – EPA; Jason Birdsong – NAWT

12:40 – 12:50 **President's Remarks** – Year in Review – Chuck Cousino (CO), President

- Communication: Website and list serve is our main way to update and communicate. Working on updates and improvements to the site. The website also lists our COI members who provide technical support to our SORA members.
- Bylaws and Strategic Plan are updated and on posted on the website
- NOWRA Mega-Conf. – about 20 SORA members attended the conference; Had a successful Tuesday evening event with over 60 attendees; Next year's conference is in late October in Sandusky, Ohio; 2026 conference is in Colorado.
- Lance Gregory is spearheading a new ad hoc committee on onsite funding.
- Looking at kicking off a quarterly or so educational series by the COIs. Allow for more educational opportunities through SORA.



12:50 – 1:30 **USEPA Decentralized Program Update – EPA staff**

Zach Lowenstein – SORA is the group that EPA needs to reach in order to get the word out on the Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Initiative

- Goal is helping communities with failing septic systems or no infrastructure
- Providing technical assistance on options for solutions to those failures
- All options on the table: repair/replace individual onsite systems; cluster decentralized systems; connect to central sewer
- 11 Pilots started in 2022
- New initiative up to 150; currently 31 on boarded now, but about 50 communities overall as some have multiple projects
- Start with an assessment and site visit – work with community leaders
- Leads into a solutions plan or a PER – Solutions Plan are more a roadmap on how to advance with cost estimates. Funding support to help put together funding applications
- Want to consider long term planning to include management and O&M
- Review of who can qualify for this program.
- Selection: must meet criteria for disadvantaged; what is the community need; openness to receiving technical assistance. Many states have no projects yet and EPA would like to be able to spread this out to more communities.
- **Request for SORA to help getting the word out. Need more communities.**
- Water TA Request Form or email septichelp@epa.gov
- More info: [Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap | US EPA](#)
- Comment: MB – has had some issues in the past with no inspection or not going through the proper channels.
- Comment: What's the timing to get into the program? And will the funding change due to election results? Funding is from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law so it should be pretty safe. This program is for 3 years, so finishes Feb 2027, but need to bring them into the program by Feb 2026 to allow the process to be completed.

Overview and Updates – Heidi Faller

- EPA Decentralized Team has expanded to a total of 5
- Onsite is not regulated by EPA. The decentralized section was created in early 2000.
- MOU Partnership has grown to 25 partners; reviewed every 3 years
 - Septic Smart Program – MOU initiative
 - Provide Technical assistance – CAWAG
 - Showcase information and technology
 - Utilize federal and MOU partners networks to gather onsite data
 - Expand mechanisms to address workforce, training, research needs
 - Reviewed activities completed in 2024 and priorities for 2025
- Review of analytics from website and contacts – mentions up 19%; community outreach; Instagram posts; Facebook; web stories; YouTube videos



- Septic tank additives and Climate Change resource guide coming soon
Both presentations will be posted to website.

1:30 – 2:00 **Additional Presentations:**

- **National Waste Alliance** – National Septage Disposal Issue
Jason Birdsong (NAWT) jason@jtserviceco.com
(For link to survey contact Jason or nicholas.huber@deq.ok.gov)

Have identified a septage disposal issue in many states coast to coast. Currently preparing a white paper that can go to federal level to highlight issue. Looking at funding – if a municipal WW facility accepts federal funding, then they should have to accept septage.

Comments:

- LG (VA) has that requirement, but there is an opt out where an engineer can say they can't take the septage (system can't handle it). JB said he's not gotten that comment before so glad to hear of it. System should have to accommodate septage if they receive federal funding.
 - KU (AZ) hearing that wastewater treatment plants are running out of capacity to take septage.
 - JB – some are pretreating the septage before sending the liquid to the wastewater plant so that's a different and new way to address it.
 - CC (CO) – wastewater plants are focused on effluent limits so anything that disrupts their compliance is an issue.
 - AB (NOWRA) –Tax payers are not getting the services they pay for and then have to deal with illegal dumping, high prices, etc.
- **SORA Ad-Hoc Committee**, National OWTS Funding Options
Lance Gregory, (VA) SORA Board

SORA Ad Hoc Funding Committee Goals:

- Create list of available federal funds
- Survey of members on type of funding being used and restrictions they see
- Clean water needs survey – are we all using it?
- Develop an outreach plan: presentation at megaconference; we can recommend, but cannot lobby
- How to quantify the need – Clean Water Needs Survey - \$74.6B for Decentralized
 - 2022 <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-05/2022-cwns-report-to-congress.pdf>
- Need to have more participation in Needs Survey next round (2027)
- EPA has listed funding sources <https://www.epa.gov/septic/funding-septic-systems>



<https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/wfc/f?p=165:1:5901866731036>

- Survey in draft form coming soon – really want to hear what are the barriers to using the funds that are available; what types of funding are available; sources of funding; grants/loans/mix? Look for it and please respond.

2:00 – 2:15 **NOWRA Update** – Allison Blodig, NOWRA President

- RCAP grant - \$800,000 3 year to produce training program – Difficult Sites; O&M; Community Systems
- NOWRA raised the concern to USDA that many engineers do not consider decentralized as an option due to lack of familiarity – hoping to get approval to do training on this aspect. NOWRA has considered cost savings of decentralized. Focus is how to educate everyone so that they understand all the options.
- 2025-2028 – NRWA and RCAP grant opportunities being applied for training (of NRWA); glossary refinement; college level course; RME training; Regulatory course
- New no cost courses on the website for NOWRA members – business courses and regulator course

2:15 – 2:30 **Captains of Industry (COI) Report**; Dick Bachelder, Sheryl Ervin (COI Rep)

- Thank you to SORA to keep Captains in the loop over the course of the year. Big thank you to the Captains and their support to SORA.
- Communications at Conference:
 - Dues and sponsorship billing separately or combined? COI would like to get one bill for both membership and sponsorship (12 of 13 preference – can work with one billing)

*** Golden Flush Award*** – Chuck Cousino, Mike Mettler, Amanda Clark

Each year SORA presents the Golden Flush Award to a SORA member who has

- *been a guiding force in moving SORA ahead;*
- *fostered relationships within SORA, including the COIs; and*
- *been instrumental in the success of SORA.*

This year's recipient has been a driving force to bring new Captains of Industry into SORA as well as continually promoting SORA within the private sector of the onsite industry. He has built a bridge between the regulatory community and the private sector with his humor, respect, and knowledge of the industry.

2024 Recipient – Dick Bachelder, COI Rep



2:30 – 2:40 Break

2:40 – 3:20 SORA Business Meeting

- Executive Director's Report; Eric Casey wecasey@comcast.net
 - Newsletter: produced first newsletter – on the website; publication date for next newsletter in December 2024 (funding, safety, National Waste Alliance, EPA activities, annual business meeting, mega-conference)
 - Website: most of the content is up to date; want to update and revamp the membership categories; making sure online application is working properly and workflow is efficient
 - Members-only page? Do have the ability, but working on what those options may be.
 - Send suggestions for newsletter and website to Eric or others on board
- Treasurer's Report – Michael Broussard (NM), Region 9 Board Member
 - Review 2024 financial highlights
 - \$43,018.40 total bank account
 - No payables due
 - \$20,996.70 revenue to date
 - Expenditures – waiting on total bill from NOWRA conference
 - Total expenditures \$21,740.27
 - Review 2024 budget
 - Shortfall \$1,395.02 based on current revenue based on budgeted amount
 - Proposed 2025 budget
 - \$22,200 proposed budget; to be reviewed and approved by the board in Dec.
- Secretary's Report – Marcia Degen (VA), Retiree

Minutes are all on the website
Listserv is up to date. If you have any other updates, please let us know.
- Election of select Regional Board Representatives
(Positions expire in 2024), Current reps willing to continue.
 - Region 1: Amanda Clark (CT) 2nd for nomination Bruce Douglas. Confirmed.
 - Region 3: Travis Sterner (MD) 2nd for nomination Marcia Degen. Confirmed.
 - Region 6: Nicholas Huber (OK); President Elect. 2nd for nomination Michael Broussard. Confirmed.
 - Region 8: Chuck Cousino (CO) 2nd nomination NA, Confirmed.
- Committee Reports
 - Strategic Planning – Travis Sterner (MD) Region 3 Board Member,
 - The current plan is good till 2028 (just updated)



- Membership – Chair, vacant – Michael Broussard (NM)
 - 50 agencies
 - 13 COIs (23 individuals)
 - 230 members (3 retirees and 3 tribal)
 - 322 total
 - Listserv use was down over the past year
 - If you use it, remember to summarize the results and share back
 - It's been used for surveying other states during rule changes especially – very helpful
 - MB noted that some of the listserv emails have been coming from another email, so you have to add that new email so you can receive posts (consider adding this to the newsletter so folks can check and fix)
- Conference – Eric Casey (Exec. Dir.) – SORA event went well.
- OWTS Funding – Lance Gregory (VA) – see previous presentation

3:20 – 3:45 New Business

➤ **Open Forum for member comment**

- Secondary safety devices (Inf.); Other items
Dave Lentz – Infiltrator dlentz@infiltratorwater.com
 - Secondary safety devices to prevent accidental drownings
 - Would like to collaborate as an industry and with regulators to address issue
 - Lots of different designs, several manufacturers, low in cost
 - Six states have the standard; Canada has a national requirement
 - Purpose today: to prompt thought and rationale for action
 - Do have model language available that they can share.
 - Having similar terms between states would be helpful.
 - Some think the cost is prohibitive.
 - Mentioned that some O&M providers are adding the devices at no cost to the homeowners just as a precaution.
 - CT put it in 2023 rules, but did not include standards for the device. They were seeing all kinds of homemade systems going in. Had to recently change the definition to include load standard and 3rd party testing.
 - VA noted that ideas to make it an integral part of the opening helps to avoid the throw away aspects that we see for other add on systems, like effluent filters.
- Website – Suggestions for improvement?
No comments
- Newsletter – Feedback from members regarding the newsletter
No comments

- Adjournment of Annual Business Meeting – 3:20 pm



Board meeting:

3:25 – 3:40 Officers Election: President, Nicholas Huber (OK); President Elect, Derek Smith (MB.CA) (tentative pending work approval); Past President Chuck Cousino (CO); Secretary, Kambridge Stephens (OK); Treasurer, Michael Broussard, (NM)

- Kambridge Stephens nominated and confirmed to At Large Position.
- Slate of Board Officers Confirmed.
- Big Thank you to Chuck Cousino for being President this last year.
- Future board meeting topic: Should we consider making the Presidential a two-year term?

SORA Board, 2024: Board Mtg. attendance bolded

Region 1: Amanda Clark (CT)	Region 9: Michael Broussard (NM), Treasurer
Region 2: Stephen Marshall (NY)	Region 10: Jeremy Simmons (WA)
Region 3: Travis Sterner (MD), Past President	At Large: Lance Gregory (VA)
Region 4: Chris Edwards (KY)	Tribal: Chris Sams (Cherokee Nation)
Region 5: Mike Mettler (IN)	Canadian Provinces: Derek Smith (Manitoba)
Region 6: Nicholas Huber (OK), President-Elect	<i>Executive Director; Eric Casey</i>
Region 7: Eric Folks (MO)	Secretary; Marcia Degen (VA Retiree)
Region 8: Chuck Cousino (CO), President	At Large: Kambridge Stephens

SORA Board, 2025:

Region 1: Amanda Clark (CT)	Region 9: Michael Broussard (NM), Treasurer
Region 2: Stephen Marshall (NY)	Region 10: Jeremy Simmons (WA)
Region 3: Travis Sterner (MD)	At Large: Lance Gregory (VA)
Region 4: Chris Edwards (KY)	Tribal: Chris Sams (Cherokee Nation)
Region 5: Mike Mettler (IN)	Canadian Provinces: Derek Smith (Manitoba)
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