

President's Message: Mark Wieser

WOWRA News is back, and there's plenty to write about....

It's been a while, but we're back on track to send members and the industry monthly updates. WOWRA News will be the only publication we send, rather than both a bi-weekly email update and a quarterly newsletter.

While we may not have sent a newsletter, that doesn't mean we haven't been active. We held a successful convention in January, have plans for seminars in November (code) and December (soils) and another conference in January of next year. We also continue to work closely with the DSPS, DNR, the Governor's office and the legislature. In the past couple of months we have had meetings with DSPS and DNR about the eSLA site and large system requirements and testified at a hearing for the Clean Water Task Force. With the recent eSLA issues, we've been in almost daily contact with DSPS working on resolutions.

To those who have renewed their memberships, I want to thank you. If you're not a member, I invite you to read on and take action right now to join. Your support helps us to continue the work of the association. As an organization, we need to rebuild our strength and that starts with a commitment from your Board of Directors to develop more of the programs and services you need. But there's more to the equation.

Maybe your bottom-line question is, "What's in it for me?" We think there's a different question when it comes to the value of an association: "If this organization didn't exist, would someone create it?"

Put another way, if your code was being reviewed, if your licenses were being reconsidered, if plan review times were extending out months instead of days, if you were looking for continuing education that focuses on education and not simply getting hours, if you were looking for a place to network with fellow contractors, product wholesalers and manufacturers, and call on a staff of professionals for help, would you want an organization there to assist you?

I think the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" WOWRA has the expertise and the strength in numbers that can get things done in our industry, and we are stronger for having you as a member.

So read on about the things that are happening right now that are affecting your business and what your association is doing. For you!

It's good to be back....

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President's Letter	1
Reports of Delayed Plan Reviews	2
Licensing Study	2
eSLA Concerns	3
Other Website Concerns	3
What's Your Experience?	3
New POWTS Plan Reviewer at DSPS	3
Budget Update	4
Water Quality Task Force	5
Join WOWRA	6

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Reports of Delayed Plan Reviews

With the season now in full swing, we're hearing about reports of delayed plan reviews. In anticipation of what we knew was going to be another busy season, WOWRA met with DSPS to discuss the 2018 season and look for ways to avoid a repeat. By meeting with DSPS leadership, we hoped to elevate this item on the agency's radar and allow us to make a recommendation to add specific staff to POWTS Plan Review

Not long after that meeting, DSPS told us:

After reviewing the matter with our POWTS team, they have taken the steps necessary to remain below 15 days as a department. Our current time is 10 days. Specific reviewers are currently close and may have at times exceeded that metric as a function of submitters being able to choose specific reviewers.

Recent reports from contractors, however, suggest that review times are around four weeks.

The Governor's budget included a goal to "Improve Professional Regulation and Licensing Functions" within the DSPS and included a request for 20 additional employees to support this goal. WOWRA specifically requested that at least some of the new staff be assigned to POWTS plan review.

While the budget is still being deliberated by the Senate and Assembly, the good news is that DSPS has added an additional plan reviewer (moving from 2 to 3) to help handle the increasing load. As the budget continues to wind its way through the legislative process, WOWRA continues to push for additional staffing for 2020 and beyond that would add additional POWTS plan reviewers and prevent the backlogs that have plagued the industry the past several years.

We are interested in learning more about your experiences and their impacts so we can continue to share the industry's concerns with the agency leadership and look for solutions – both short-term and long-term.

Here are a few other comments/questions we've received so far and are working on:

I've not been able to get answers about what lead time is, nor where to submit. I was told, "When you apply online the calendar will then tell you what the review date is. We don't give lead times anymore.

Does the DSPS ONLY accept electronic submissions now?

Why doesn't anyone return my calls and text messages?

Licensing Study

At the end of 2018, the DSPS issued a report on professional licensing as required by the 2017-2019 budget bill. That report included a recommendation that the Plumbing and POWTS Designer Licenses be eliminated.

With a change in the administration just a few weeks later, the DSPS recommendations have remained just that – recommendations. The Governor's proposed budget did not include any of the DSPS recommendations and, to this point in the budget process, the elimination of the designer licenses has remained off the table. WOWRA has been actively monitoring this situation and has advocated for the continuation of the designer license as a necessary part of the industry's regulatory infrastructure and the public's health and safety.

eSLA Concerns

In addition to delays with plan review, several members have reported problems with the Department's eSLA system. We've had reports of problems with the site's shopping cart and recording of payments.

The effect of all of this to require more time and documentation on the part of the submitting contractors. We recognize that every new system has a period when the bugs are worked out, the timing of the implementation is such that it is causing a lot of headaches at the worst possible time.

To assist the Department with a "fix" for the system, we're curious if you're experiencing any issues that we can bring to their attention – as an industry – to help raise the awareness and importance of the problem and need for a solution, which includes bringing the industry to the table.

Other Website Concerns

In response to an issue raised by one member, DSPS has indicated that it is working on a revision to its website. The site was updated recently, and one of the changes made affected the product approval section.

If you go to the old POWTS product approval site, you will be redirected to the eSLA site. At the new site, you can click on **Plumbing Products** which allows you to enter the manufacturer's name, but only if you know the specific name of the manufacturer of the product.

What you won't find any longer is an alphabetical list of manufacturers or products to narrow your search. The broader search can return dozens of pages of approvals that need to be sifted to find the desired information and even then, some of the links to the approval letters didn't work.

What's Your Experience?

To serve the industry, WOWRA needs your input. We appreciate everyone who has reached out so far and we are working on these and other issues on your behalf. At this point, we're interested in additional input and collecting these experiences - good and bad - and bringing them to the Department for their review/response collectively.

The value is that we are working together – with the strength of the association – to address your concerns; a far more powerful way to approach the Department that bringing concerns one by one. We invite you to share your concerns by email at info@wowra.com.

New POWTS Plan Reviewer at DSPS

The new POWTS plan reviewer at DSPS is CeCe Rudnicki (Tesky), who started in early June. She held various positions with Rusk County, leaving her position as Director of Land Conservation and Development to take the position at DSPS. CeCe has been very active with the Wisconsin County Code Administrators. Designers may submit plans to her using eSLA and searching for her name or scheduling for the first available appointment (recommended). CeCe replaces Ed Taylor who worked in the Hayward office and retired in March.

Budget Update

The Joint Finance Committee has concluded its markup of the State Budget and the Senate and Assembly will now review, amend and pass a budget that will go to Governor Evers for his consideration.

Three provisions of the Evers budget were of particular interest to WOWRA:

- As noted earlier, the Governor recommended the addition of 20 full-time employees to the DSPS .
- In addition, the Evers' budgets contained a recommendation that the sunset provision on the Wisconsin Fund (currently June 30, 2021) be eliminated – thus making the program permanent.
- The Governor proposed an investment in information technology projects for the DSPS.

After its review, the Joint Finance Committee approved the following and advanced these proposals to the full Senate and Assembly:

DSPS Professional and Trade Regulation Staff

On an 11-3 vote (2 absences) the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) voted to decrease the amount of new DSPS staff originally proposed by Governor Evers from 20 positions to 6 positions. Those positions that were approved by the JFC will be beneficial to the POWTS-related trades and are as follows:

- Division of Professional Credential Processing
 - o Funded (2) FTE for trades credential processing staff
- Trade Regulation
 - o Funded (2) FTE for building systems consultants
 - o Funded (2) FTE for license and permit program associates

POWTS Grant Program

On an 11-3 vote, the JFC voted to approve continuation of funding for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 budgets. They also voted to approve an additional \$185,000 which would be expended to fully fund applications received for POWTS Grants in 2019-20. The additional \$185,000 is to ensure the 193 qualified applicants who submitted by February 1, 2019 will receive up to 87% of the eligible grant amount. The 2020-21 POWTS grant appropriation remains at the current \$840,000. Unfortunately, the JFC did not vote to extend the grant program beyond June 30, 2021 as was voted for during last budget.

DSPS Information Technology Projects

On an 11-3 vote, the JFC voted to approve the Governor's proposal to use \$4 million over the two-year biennium for informational technology improvement projects to replace the trades credentialing system. The motion to improve the DSPS credentialing system also included a transfer of \$5 million from the Division of Industry Services program revenue general fund operations to the general fund.

Water Quality Task Force

Earlier this year, Governor Evers declared this year to be the “Year of Clean Water.” Even as he made his declaration, the Water Quality Task Force was created to gather information and make policy recommendations to better assess and improve the quality of both surface water and ground water in our state. It is the goal of the Task Force to listen to a diverse group of stakeholders so it can include all perspectives as it moves forward.

To do that, the Task Force is conducting hearings throughout the State, with the first being held in Madison and then moving from the southern part of the state to the north. The Task Force anticipates its last hearing will take place in the Fall. After the hearings conclude, the group will deliberate on potential legislation (bipartisan) that can be introduced to address some of the concerns raised during their hearings.

WOWRA participated in the hearing held in Janesville in May. Kevin Stange speaking on behalf of WOWRA and joined in the septic trades presentation by Mark Wieser (Wieser Concrete, representing the Wisconsin Precast Concrete Association) and Lance Petrsek (Associates Septic Service, representing the Wisconsin Liquid Waste Carriers Association). George Klaetsch, lobbyist for each of the groups, provided an overview of the industry and introduced each of the speakers.

The septic trades presentations can be found on the Task Force website at:

<https://legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/committees/assembly/STF-WQ/media/1111/septic-trades-presentation.pdf>.

Additional materials and information about future hearings can be found at: <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/committees/assembly/STF-WQ/>.

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