

Florida Bill for Workforce Development for Water Utilities

Florida and we are sure other states are expecting a large workforce shortage within the Water Utility Industry going forward, as many in our workforce who have been safeguarding our Public Health Protection/Environmental Protection are retirement age or beyond currently. FRWA in partnership with the Florida Department of Education, the Department of Labor and USDA have started a Water Operation Specialist Apprenticeship Program. Our first Two, 2-year programs graduated a total of 12 apprentices who became licensed in the water and/or wastewater industry. The program teaches the required curriculum, hands on instruction and all related skills to be a successful water utility work who has the appropriate certification to safeguard the water in their communities. They also receive a FDOE and DOL national certificate. We currently have three more classes going at this time, one in the Southeast, (Miami-Dade) one in the Southwest, (St. Petersburg) and one in the Northwest (South Walton) with a total of 40 apprentices. Working on starting another one this month in Williston with another 12 apprentices. We have graduated 18 apprentices into the workforce in Florida so far. FRWA lead on a bill in the Florida Legislature last year to improve workforce availability for Water Utilities. This bill established Water Utility workers as critical, first responders, provided statutory authority for Florida to have reciprocity for Water and Wastewater Operator licensing with other states leaving only one state in the United States doesn't share this program. Additionally, it awarded veteran preference, additional credit and encouragement to remain in the public health protection business in Florida and gave temporary licensure for out of state operators to come help/meet water worker requirements after a Florida Emergency event like a hurricane.