



# 10-Minute Supervisor Trainings

Kentucky Soil and Water Conservation Commission

DECEMBER 2016

## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

Conservation districts are a vital part of each community but how well is your district known? Does the public know and understand what you do? How accessible are your staff and services? These are a few of the many questions that need to be answered by your board of supervisors and staff.

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As elected officials it is the supervisors' role to make important decisions about implementing conservation and education needs facing your county. While doing this, we must also promote efficiency, economy and accountability in all district programs. The importance of how the public sees your office and services will become vital in the future for accountability, funding, and the overall success of the district. Here are a few suggestions on improvement and some new ideas as well.

**1. Be Visible:** How often does your district go out into the public? If your answer was "not often" then there is a little work to be done.

**Fiscal Court meetings:** One of the most important things you can do is ensure financial stability. This can be done by attending a fiscal court meeting a few times a year and making a presentation. In your presentation you can give an update on budget, activities and successes. This will make it easier for both the judge and magistrates to understand how your funds are being used, and you will have a better chance of gaining their support when needed.

**Host yearly cooperators meetings:** You can have a meal or not, this just gives the board a chance to showcase their activities and programs and gain more local involvement. These meetings also give the landowners in the community a chance to ask questions and voice their concerns.

**Local Resources:** Make use of what your community has to offer such as local radio and newspapers. Publish a weekly article, advertise upcoming events, equipment rentals, cost share programs, etc. Most will let you do this free, and it is great exposure. Newsletters and websites are also a big success. This gives the public a chance to be updated on what you are doing and what you have to offer.

**Education:** One of the conservation district's goals is to educate the young and old about conserving our natural resources. There is no better way to do this than establishing a good relationship with the schools. Make them aware of contests, scholarships, and offer them resources. Most RC&D areas, as well as the Division of Water, have an Enviroscape or other table top models for use of the Districts. Have your staff trained and then contact the schools and go into the classroom. If you are losing participation in the programs you offer – shift your attention to something new.

**2. Office Etiquette:** It is crucial to have District staff be professional and knowledgeable at the office. They are the first person the general public comes into contact with. How they represent the district can make all the difference. It is important for them to have a good attitude, customer respect, lots of patience and common courtesy.

**3. Be Involved:** Have a good working relationship with other agencies such as Extension, FSA, Ag Credit, Cattleman's Association, and Farm Bureau and make it a point to do joint activities. School career days, ground breakings, grand openings, field days and other agency events are an excellent opportunity to be seen and heard. Take a display or a powerpoint and speak whenever and wherever you can. This also gives you a chance to meet new people in the area that may not be "traditional" customers.

**4. Work on Reporting:** The reports that are submitted each year such as your budget, plan of work, annual financial report, annual report and long range plan are so important. Not only are they viewed by your board but by the local fiscal court, Division of Conservation and the citizens of your county. It is important to work on these as a board and to make them "real." These outline what you are doing and what you plan to do and are crucial when it comes to funding. These documents give a real picture of your district and how "in demand" your services are.

**5. Programs and Activities:** If you are losing participation in some of the programs you have been doing for years, maybe it is time to do something new. Here are a few ideas:

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| Soil Stewardship in the school or church       | Attend Community Events              |
| Sponsor Envirothon Team                        | Plant trees                          |
| Assist Local FFA or have them assist you       | Sponsor Soil testing                 |
| Sponsor Ag in the Classroom                    | Provide Scholarships for 4-H &       |
| Farm Tours                                     | Conservation Camp                    |
| Local Cooperators Meetings                     | Enviroscape Presentations            |
| Field Days                                     | Provide College Scholarships         |
| Open House                                     | Ag Breakfast                         |
| Earth/Arbor Day Involvement                    | Teacher Luncheon                     |
| Offer Educational Materials                    | Local Cost Share Programs            |
| Articles – Newsletters                         | Team up with teachers& see what they |
| Water Watch – Testing                          | need                                 |
| Form a Junior Board & complete a local project | Rent Equipment                       |
| Sell Filter Fabric or other needed material    | Host Guest Speakers                  |

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What events does your district participate in that make them noticeable in the public?
2. What goals has your district set for this fiscal year to make them more understood in the public?