



10-Minute Supervisor Trainings

Kentucky Soil and Water Conservation Commission

OCTOBER 2017

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Every office in every county is different and comes with different board members and office personnel who all have different personalities. Although we are all working towards what is best for our counties – sometimes we have conflicting views and don't always agree. The key to resolving conflict of course is communication. **Conservation districts are and should be run just like a business.**

In this month's training we will talk about a few things that will make getting along much easier.

Board Members: Can't we all just get along?? Have you ever come out of a board meeting and felt like maybe you weren't heard or maybe that other members came across too strongly? Part of being a board member is voicing your opinion and always keeping the district's best interest in mind. Sometimes that doesn't come easily. Below are some tips for making sure that each board member has a chance to be heard and comes across clearly.

It is the chairman's responsibility to keep the meeting running smoothly. A good chairman should give each member ample time to comment and explain their views and make sure that everyone feels heard. All board meetings should be timely and follow Robert's Rules of Order. There's a website for Robert's Rules that can answer most questions (<http://www.robertsrules.com/>), and printed versions are available at most online booksellers.

Members should feel comfortable voicing their ideas and opinions and bringing any problems concerning the conservation district to the table. Each member should:

- Think before they speak being careful not to speak over each other.
- Obtain all facts necessary.
- Ask pertinent questions being sure that your comments are communicated clearly.
- Be respectful to each other.
- Remain calm.
- Keep discussion about district business - not making discussion "personal".
- Remember that the conservation district is a public entity and open to the public. Any minutes or meeting material can be viewed.
- **Conservation districts are and should be run just like a business and in a professional manner.**

Board Member remediation

The chairman should make effort possible to resolve any conflicts among members or personnel consulting the vice chairman or others in the chain of command if needed. Sometimes some simple communication will do the trick – sometimes having a simple conversation in a professional manner will work wonders.

Can public officials such as board members be removed from office? No. They are elected public officials and would have to be voted out of office.

Documentation: Each district should have a handbook on file that CLEARLY states all responsibilities for supervisors according to KRS262.150 & 262.240. This should be viewed and updated as necessary. Any requirements for your county should also be stated here (per diem, expense reimbursement, travel, meeting attendance, committee assignments, etc.) Each supervisor should be given a copy of this and the DOC supervisor handbook located on www.conservation.ky.gov. If you do not have this information – your field representative can help with developing a personnel handbook.

Resolving Conflict between Office Personnel and the Board:

Every office has at least a secretary or district coordinator and may have technicians, education coordinators and NRCS personnel who work together on a daily basis. The district boards are responsible for making sure that their local offices have the employees, resources, training and skills necessary to make their BUSINESS is efficient and productive as possible. A **VITAL** part is again making sure that each employee (secretary, technician, equipment manager, etc.) has an updated job description that CLEARLY defines their duties and responsibilities. This information should also be outlined in the district personnel handbook. The employees should also each have a copy and review this as needed. The field representative can help with this. If you have these things in place and have reviewed them with the employee, this will help with keeping disagreements between the board and employee at a minimum. Below are some topics that need to be addressed and documented:

- Although the whole board supervises employees – who is the direct contact?
- Employee duties, pay, travel policy, reimbursement, hours, leave policy, dress code, office behavior

Evaluations: It is absolutely essential to have set dates for evaluations and or reviews for ALL employees on at LEAST a yearly basis. Many districts do this around the budget to establish a basis for pay increase or any actions necessary. During evaluations boards should:

- Be honest with your employees
- Go over job duties and expectations
- Consult with the field representatives to check on DOC requirements
- Ask what is going well and what is not
- Give your employees the opportunity to talk about what they need to do their jobs better.
- Keep accurate documentation of the results of the evaluations to establish a basis for improvement or other matters.

Remediation for Employees:

- Probationary period that outlines any issues and what the employee and the board have agreed to improve situations.
- Part of any remediation is documentation of employees that outlines dates and times when events have taken place and times you have directly addressed these issues with the employee.
- Follow through with disciplinary actions. It is difficult, but remember it is a business and the documentation should speak for itself.
- Honest communication about problems and solutions.
- Follow up with employee.
- Consult with your field rep, DOC and county attorney when considering termination or leave without pay, etc.
- Situations such as embezzlement, violence, harassment, discrimination or other actions that endanger workplace safety are grounds for termination but must also be followed up with written documentation.

Office Conflicts between employees Below are some tips to keep office conflicts to a minimum.

- Have an office meeting once a week to establish what needs to be done, who is going where and share any other info.
- Talk it out! Being honest, up front and respectful to each other and their space is the best way to deal with most conflict. Confrontation, although sometimes uncomfortable, can be a very positive thing if handled quickly and professionally.
- Take messages and make sure that they are delivered by note, text or e-mail.
- Be organized - follow through on your duties - meet deadlines. Be on time and let someone know if you are not going to be there.
- Do not supervise each other – take all conflicts to the board of supervisors or follow the chain of command above.

An office that has clear expectations and established guidelines will run more smoothly than those that do not. It is the board of supervisors' responsibility to see that these are in place.

