

REPORT ON REGIONAL EQUIPMENT MANAGERS' CONFERENCES

Robert W. Kuenzli, *Consultant*

The State Highway Regional Equipment Managers' Conferences occur annually within their respective geographical areas. The meetings are one of many benefits that members enjoy. Valuable also is contact with members throughout the year by telephone, FAX, letters and occasionally in person. Others not involved in State Highway fleet activities could benefit by forming their own common interest groups. Examples are smaller groups within a geographical area involving other public sectors such as cities, counties, fire and transit districts and the private sector with fleets such as dump truck operators, food and hard goods, utilities and construction companies.

The State Highway Regional Equipment Managers' Groups are comprised usually of one principal management representative who has fleet management, fleet operation or related fleet managerial responsibilities. Often the representative is the principal manager of the State's fleet or the manager of fleet operation, fleet repair and shop operation or fleet specification, purchasing and fleet supply and parts operation. This mix of management responsibilities and expertise enhances the regional group makeup and is especially beneficial during the annual meetings. Each regional state is encouraged to have a representative at the meeting. If additional representatives attend, these guests are encouraged to minimize their involvement to allow for a structured and productive meeting. Often these guests are asked to comment and offer input but are not on the agenda. The reason for limiting input from guests is to allow complete coverage of the agenda items in the time allocated. Discussions before and after the formal meeting are beneficial and allow observers to comment and learn.

The meetings are of a hands-on nature sharing information and of a "workshop" makeup. The meetings have a structured, printed agenda with the principal purpose to share information, experience, concerns, problems, new concepts, regulations, equipment types and designs, and all aspects of fleet management, operations and involvement. Subjects may include personnel matters, shop management, purchasing, specifications, environmental concerns, parts and supplies, fleet operation and management. The meetings are intensive covering broad and involved areas of activities encompassing State Highway type equipment and operations.

Each regional group functions independently, however, their makeup, goals and objectives are very similar. The annual meetings usually are two to two and one-half days and are hosted by a different state each year usually on a rotational basis. The host state often encourages their middle managers and some staff members in their fleet and related operations to attend as observing guests. The host state for the next annual meeting is determined at the conclusion of the present meeting. The next year's host state has the responsibility to arrange and "chair" the meeting. This involves selecting the meeting site, room accommodations and other logistical items. Also, each state's representative is usually contacted three months prior to the meeting and invited to suggest or request agenda topics. The agenda format often differs between and within the regional meetings. Sometimes they allow each state an hour or more to discuss and gather input on specific subjects that they have requested. Another agenda format identifies "the subject" and the discussion unfolds with representatives participating. Mailing the agenda to members a few months prior to the meeting, along with meeting dates, location, accommodations and information allows members to make plans and reservations.

At the conclusion of each meeting or within a few weeks, the host state provides a list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of the states' representatives to each participant. Usually group photographs taken at the meeting are sent. A flow of information continues all year between participants and others involved in specialty areas from each state. Members value contacts throughout the year with member states and with representatives from other regions.

Most groups do not allow manufacturer or business representatives to attend the formal portion of the meetings. On occasion a manufacturer or product representative may be invited for a brief presentation. These presentations are usually generic in nature but may address specific concerns that members have voiced. No advertising is permitted in the meetings.

The first state highway equipment regional group was formed by the Equipment Managers from the states of Washington, California and Oregon. After numerous telephone conversations they met in a motel at the San Francisco Airport in 1969. Subsequently the Western States Highway Equipment Managers' Group has met annually. The last meeting was hosted by the Equipment Section of the Colorado Department of Highways at Glenwood Springs, Colorado in September 1991.

Over the years the Western Group encouraged the formation of other regional groups with guests from other states attending meetings for inspiration and input.

These included Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas. Texas became a member of the Western Group in 1982. Later Nebraska, Arkansas and Oklahoma became members of their respective regional groups and were instrumental in their formation and development. As the "word and message" spread in the 1980's and with the support of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Committee A3C08, *Maintenance Equipment*, then chaired by Bob Flaherty, other groups have been formed. The Southeastern Group was formed in November 1987. Later the Midwestern Group was formed in 1989. The TRB Committee A3C08, now chaired by Doug Nielsen, along with members of all three Regional Groups encourage and support the formation of a Northeastern State Highway Equipment Managers' Group. Members of the existing regional groups have made continued contacts over the years and continue to pursue formation of a Northeastern Group.

Many of the topics discussed at the various regional meetings are the same or similar. This similarity enforces the concept that most problems and information are common throughout the country. A few exceptions may be snow plow design in Florida or tropical vegetation and mowing equipment in Alaska. Some examples of subjects addressed at the last regional meetings and topics scheduled for the 1992 meetings along with meeting locations and dates are:

- The Southwestern Group of twelve states formed in 1987 held their last meeting April 21 through 23, 1992, hosted by Tennessee at Pigeon Forge. Their next meeting will be hosted by North Carolina probably in April 1993. Some subjects addressed at the last meeting included recycle update, water base traffic line paint, medium duty trucks, equipment disposal, equipment management update, preventive maintenance program, equipment management study, tire and oil filter disposal, Freon discussion, specification review, pavers, mowers and rollers, and responses and discussion of a question and answer survey mailed out prior to the meeting.
- The Midwestern Group of thirteen states formed in 1989 had their last meeting in June 1991, hosted by Kansas and held in Olathe just outside Kansas City. The next meeting will be hosted by Minnesota and held in Minneapolis in June 1992. This group has invited as guests Provincial equipment representatives from two neighboring Canadian Provinces. A representative from Manitoba has attended several times. Subjects covered at the last meeting included

optimum replacement time for light trucks, truck hydraulic systems and spreader controls on dump trucks, comparison of snow plow specifications, equipment procurement procedures, alternate fuels, gasoline versus diesel in light duty trucks and pickups, tire management and underground fuel storage tanks. One of the highlights of the meeting was a tour of the equipment shop area and display of Kansas DOT equipment.

Subjects to be discussed at the meeting in 1992 include mowing equipment, truck-mounted attenuators, disposal of oil filters and other hazardous material, melting applicators for rubberized asphalt, specification comparisons of loaders and backhoes, heated windshield on some vehicles and experiences with electric diesel engine controls.

- The Western Group of fourteen states formed in 1969 held their last meeting in late September 1991 hosted by Colorado at Glenwood Springs. The next meeting will be hosted by Montana and held at Helena on September 29, 30 and October 1, 1992. For various reasons Hawaii and Alaska are not always represented. The group has never met in Hawaii, but dreams of a 50th anniversary there! Subjects of the last meeting included fleet policies and procedures, mechanic training, shop management and supplies, truck-mounted attenuators, equipment purchasing and specifications, tires, disposal of equipment, equipment information systems, clean burning alternate fuels, multiple use equipment, pavement striping equipment, snow blowers, snow plow design and electric controlled diesel engines. Subjects for the 1992 meeting are now being collected and were not available.
- The proposed Northeastern Group, consisting of the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and District of Columbia, has not become a reality. Many contacts have been made but never finalized. With continued interest and encouragement by the other Regional members, TRB Committee A3C08 and the involvement of Ed Fahrenkopf of New York and others in the Northeastern area, this group may become reality.

Mr. Fahrenkopf, also a member of the TRB Committee A3C08, in an effort to initiate interest that may spark the formation of a Northeastern Group has been successful in having equipment issues included on the agenda for the regional

Highway and Transportation Maintenance Officials' meeting of New England, New York and New Jersey. This meeting was held in September 1991 and included 39 participants from Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey and New York State Thruway Authority. The equipment items discussed at this meeting were CDL training, thermoplastic versus water borne paint and the associated application equipment, truck-mounted attenuators, truck and plow lease or rental equipment financing, prototype dual direction

dumping bodies and reduction moving operations. Mr. Fahrenkopf indicates that the equipment related discussions at this meeting were productive; however, he will continue to pursue the formation of a regional meeting dedicated solely to state highway equipment matters.

The value of these regional meetings results from the strengths of their participating members sharing for the common good and the benefit of the system.