

Drunken driving goggles deliver serious message



Doc Avery of the York Water District wears glasses that simulate driving over the legal limit of alcohol, or "fatal vision," with Sheriff Deputy Joe Schnupp of the Cumberland County Sheriff Department as part of the Southern Maine Safety Rodeo in Kittery, Maine.

By **Deborah Mcdermott**
dmcdermott@seacoastonline.com
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KITTERY, Maine — "Whoa."

That was a common refrain heard Wednesday, as one person after another donned "drunken driving" goggles, got behind the wheel of a golf cart and tried to navigate a safety-cone course at the Kittery Water District as part of a daylong York County Safety Rodeo.

The rodeo, co-sponsored by KWD and the Maine Rural Water Association of Brunswick, attracted more than 40 area water, wastewater, public works and similar employees, all of whom are required to undergo safety training. The rodeo is a way for them to gather, enjoy the camaraderie of colleagues and meet some of those safety mandates.

They gathered in the parking lot behind the KWD building on Route 1 to take a break from classroom work of the morning and afternoon. A Cumberland County sheriff's deputy brought the "fatal vision goggles," which he said removes the wearer's peripheral vision and simulates drunken driving. A Scarborough police officer set up "the seat belt convincer," which hurtles someone in a "car" going down an incline to simulate what those crash dummies go through.

There was much laughter and teasing at both stations, but underlying the demonstrations was a serious message, said Tom Bahun, of the Maine Rural Water Association.

"Driver safety is a big part of worker safety," he said. "It's something most of these guys need to be thinking about."

Another demonstration involved dealing with "confined space" — not uncommon among workers who have to go down manholes. There was actually a manhole set up, and trainers simulated a situation in which a worker might be stuck in one. The workers dealt with breathing hazards and practiced with a ventilator.

Among those who found this training useful was Peter Gagne of the North Berwick Water District. He said his job requires him to descend manholes, and while he acts in a safe manner, "this kind of training reinforces what we need to be thinking about."

Also attending were nine members of the York Water District, which sponsored a similar rodeo last fall. The training, said plant operator Doc Avery, is "very helpful. You have to get so many hours in to keep your license, and this way we can do a lot of the work at once."

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