



Connecting with Partners in Europe

Leveraging our mutual strengths

BY WILLIAM BUSCH, SR/WA

The thought of exporting and integrating our Association's resources globally has economic and functional potential that is phenomenally exciting. As IRWA continues to expand its reach around the globe, the Association recently formalized a relationship with the Institute for Underground Infrastructure (IKT) in Germany, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between our two organizations. We have already found our relationship to be very useful, learning much from our exchange of best practices and webinar sessions, as well as from both in-person and virtual meetings.

REACHING OUT

It all started four years ago when I was working for the San Diego County Water Authority and found myself in need of some technical data regarding potential tree root damage to underground pipelines. While conducting

some research for her master's degree, my wife Marjorie Busch came across IKT and identified it as a potential information resource for me as well. We reached out to Christoph Bennerscheidt, PE, the Lead Research Engineer at IKT. I quickly realized that not only did IKT's engineering and research staff have specific tree root invasion information pertinent to my right of way management issues, but we also had many professional interests in common.

The IKT is a neutral, independent, non-profit research, testing and consulting institute. It focuses on the construction of underground pipes and networks for gas, water and waste-water. It is a frequent research and testing partner for utilities, sewer system operators, water associations and other industries. A few months after first contacting them, Majorie and I met with IKT staff in person at their facility in Gelsenkirchen, Germany.



Left, IKT's Bert Bosseler presented at IRWA's 2013 Conference on the challenges Germany is experiencing in switching from nuclear power to renewable; Above, Bill and Marjorie Busch traveled to Germany to meet with Bert and Christoph Bennerscheidt for the inaugural working group meeting at IKT headquarters.

Since that simple beginning, representatives from IKT have been featured seminar speakers at IRWA Annual Conferences, covering topics such as how the growth potential of roots can affect utilities, Germany's conversion from nuclear to green energy, and managing utilities in the crowded urban underground environment. They have become a welcome addition to the Association's international outreach efforts, and in early 2013, Christoph became IRWA's first member in Germany. We have also cooperated on articles for Right of Way Magazine.

A MEETING OF MINDS

At IRWA's 2013 Annual International Education Conference in Charleston, West Virginia, IKT and IRWA had high-level discussions regarding future cooperation that included outlining our compatible strengths. Both organizations have broad international ties and are internationally recognized as experts in our respective fields of influence - IKT for technical research and IRWA for management practices, education and certification programs. Additionally, each organization is looking to expand its international influence. We also both deal with underground utilities and have similar educational training interests.

The foundation laid at IRWA's 2013 Conference has resulted in rapid developments. On September 14, 2013, IRWA and IKT executed the Memorandum of Understanding, establishing a six person working group to promote cooperation. The IRWA portion of the group is comprised

of myself, Glenn Winfree, SR/WA from Duke Energy and Bill Rose, PE from the San Diego County Water Authority. The German group members are Christoph, Bert Bosseler, Ph.D., the Head Scientist at IKT, and Peter Lampret, Ph.D., a Director at the German utility ELE. The first meeting was held at IKT headquarters in Germany in October and was attended in person by the three German members and myself, and via telecom by Glenn and Bill. During this meeting, IKT proposed a webinar series that IRWA and IKT would co-sponsor at no cost to IRWA.

The webinar we developed is an eight-part series dealing with management of crowded underground utilities in the urban environment. Nineteen infrastructure specialists from the United States, Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Algeria took part in the first installment of the webinar, which was held in October and promoted cooperation and an international information exchange between our countries.

GROWING THROUGH COLLABORATION

To leverage our compatible strengths and common goals, the working group is also currently evaluating the demand and feasibility of an international certification that would require participants to take a combination of IRWA and IKT courses, participate in webinars, and view certain on-site locations. There will likely be more information to share on this following some market research and curriculum development.

This collaborative effort with our new affiliate in Germany is a perfect example of how our members are already beginning to benefit from IRWA's international expansion. These partnerships will continue to fuel our growth as we are joined by transportation experts from Australia, oil and gas specialists from the Middle East, and appraisers, surveyors and electric utility land agents from various areas of Africa and Central America as well.

It is possible that this webinar, in conjunction with courses developed by IRWA and IKT, could form the basis for an international certification. Imagine individuals from around the world logging on to IRWA online courses to achieve a certification that is internationally recognized!

In a few short months, we have developed significant strategies and resources for sharing information internationally, and we are just getting started. We live in exciting times and are taking advantage of the highly technological world to take IRWA to the next level. ★



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