



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Sewer Rats plunge into water treatment competition and excel

MWRD staff display skills for an international audience



Sewer Rat team members and coaches from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago included (from l to r): Jim McNamara, Rich Stubing, John Malinowski, John Conry, Matt Jurjovec, Sandra Matual, Ed Staudacher and Josh Filler.

They sawed and sliced piping, tested water quality and practiced emergency response all while racing against a clock, and in the end the Sewer Rats team of workers from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) showed why the agency makes clean water a priority.

The team of tradesmen placed second in a laboratory event in the 2015 Operations Challenge at the Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and

Conference (WEFTEC) out of 44 teams representing water treatment agencies across the globe.

“We are proud of our hardworking, talented Sewer Rats. These employees represent the District well and show the world why the MWRD is a leader in water treatment and water quality,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “We thank them for their participation, dedication to their craft and extra hours spent training for this competition. We hope this work gives area residents

Sewer Rats plunge into water treatment competition and excel *(continued)*

comfort in knowing that our employees pay the utmost attention to water quality issues.”

The Sewer Rats team consisting of John Conry, Josh Filler, Sandra Matual, and John Malinowski work in both maintenance and operations at the MWRD. Competing in the Operations Challenge is an excellent opportunity for teams to showcase their skills and expertise. It is also an excellent training tool for everyday skills, such as safety and maintenance, and a way to cross-train employees in areas that they normally would not be exposed to.

At the Operations Challenge there were five events where the four-person team must complete a task related to maintenance and operations at a water treatment plant. These events include lab work, process control, collections, maintenance and safety. The same four team members compete in all of the events, and being the home team at WEFTEC, held at McCormick Place this year, meant large crowds cheering the Sewer Rats on as they raced against the clock with judges grading their every move. All events were timed with the goal being to complete the event in the fastest time without any penalties. The penalties come in the form of time added to the event and can be severe since the objective is to perform the events using proper technique while following appropriate safety standards in a timely manner.

As part of the lab event, operators were required to run straight and diluted samples of ammonia and alkalinity to determine basic alkalinity needs of a treatment plant based on influent ammonia and alkalinity values. Once these values were identified, the Sewer Rats performed calculations to identify if adequate alkalinity is available to provide complete nitrification. If not, more calculations were done to allow the correct additional alkalinity. Determining alkalinity is crucial in the water treatment process to ensure a waterway’s ability to neutralize acid upon receiving treated water. In addition, profiling of aeration basins and final clarifiers were part of the equation. Influent and effluent values were determined by analysis, and appropriate remediation was identified.

While only four members of the team took the platform during competition, the team received assistance and coaching from fellow employees at MWRD.



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago employees and Sewer Rat team members, Josh Filler, an electrical mechanic sub-foreman, and treatment plant operator Sandra Matual compete in the laboratory event at the Operations Challenge held at the Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference at McCormick Place.



Combining precision in chemistry and math, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) machinist John Malinowski and MWRD pipefitter leadman John Conry competed for the Sewer Rats as part of a lab event at the 2015 Operations Challenge at the Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference at McCormick Place.

Ed Staudacher, manager of the team, credited MWRD lab staff, including Vic Olchowka, Anas Rabah, Sandra Conrad, Rebecca Rose and retiree Tom Liston for their mentorship and knowledge in preparing the team. Representing the host city, the Sewer Rats also had the opportunity to train for the competition with two teams from Germany, providing an outlet to share best practices in water treatment and a rooting interest in each other.

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Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwr.org) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.