Written by MARK JAEGER
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Village crew earns high grades for running state-of-the-art facility

As a general rule, a municipal wastewater treatment plant is one of those anonymous operations where the less you hear about them, the better.

If toilets flush and sewers don't back up, people are generally happy with their local treatment plant.

Still, employees at the Village of Saukville water and wastewater plant found themselves in the spotlight recently, earning a recognition from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as laboratory of the year.

Utility Supt. Jerry Dickmann and his crew is usually perfectly content to operate behind the scenes.

"People don't really know all that goes on here, and they don't want to know," said lab manager Ray Hartman, who has been with the village utility for 24 years.

Other plant employees include Kyle Miller, Dale Kropidlowski and Eric Paulus

The award recognizes the plant for its meticulous attention to quality control.

"The laboratory analyzes second-source standards each time it performs total phosphorus and ammonia analysis. They also participate in a blind standard program, that is clearly above and beyond what is required," noted DNR inspector George Bowman.

Detailed log books are maintained documenting all critical readings, a practice which proves especially useful when tracking unexpectedly high readings during BOD (biochemical oxygen demand) testing, he wrote.

Bowman praised how the village plant reacted to the implementation of more stringent state wastewater standards in 2008 and deficiencies that were identified in a site inspection that year.

"The laboratory responded to the evaluation by not only correcting all deficiencies but by kicking it up a notch, taking the initiative to do more than was necessary," the nomination form noted.

Bowman said he was especially impressed with how neat the lab area is kept.

"I was very surprised to find out their laboratory was over 10 years old. It appeared to be a new

facility," he wrote.

Dickmann said the plant crew is always anxious to be part of pilot projects looking for better ways to process wastewater.

"We like being cutting edge. We've been using ultraviolet light to disinfect for 12 years, and some communities around here are just starting to look into it," he said.

Dickmann plans to retire in July after 33 years with the village, but he said he is not concerned about any drop off in quality at the plant when he leaves.

"These guys do all the work. I just keep track of the dollars," he joked.

The treatment plant has an average daily design flow of 1.6 million gallons, with a peak flow capacity of 3.8 million gallons per day.

The village's first sanitary sewers were installed in 1938. Untreated sewage was pumped into the Milwaukee River until is first treatment plant was constructed in 1959.

Various upgrades and expansions followed, with the current facility completed in 2002, using biological, chemical and physical treatment to keep effluent within DNR limits.

At the time of its completion, the plant had capacity sufficient for 20 years of projected growth, a number which has been extended because of the recent lull in development.

Image Information: MEMBERS OF THE Village of Saukville utility department got a chance to take a bow during a recent Village Board meeting after being recognized by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for operating the best wastewater treatment plant lab in the state. Accepting the award were (from left) Dale Kropidlowski, Kyle Miller, Ray Hartmann, Jerry Dickmann and Eric Paulus. Photo by Mark Jaeger