

*The L.A.
Wrecking Crew
tears things up
in Chicago*

Operations Challenge



In the final moments of the Operations Challenge awards ceremony, there seemed little doubt about who would take the Division I title. The crowd that had gathered in the Chicago Marriott's Grand Ballroom knew the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) already had won four of the five events, while last year's champion, the L.A. Wrecking Crew, had not won any. Imagine, then, the excitement when the L.A. Wrecking Crew was awarded the Operations Challenge Division I title for the second year in a row. The ensuing cheers could be heard throughout the hotel and halfway across Lake Michigan. (Or so it seemed.) How did all of this come to pass?

"Consistency throughout," said L.A. Wrecking Crew rookie Gustavo Caro. "We didn't dominate any one event." The team placed second, third, or fourth in every event.

A jubilant Wrecking Crew accepts the first place award from past president Phil Gerwert.

The L.A. Wrecking Crew took the Division I title for the second consecutive year.

"We couldn't have done it without Dave," Caro added, referring to Dave Hickey, who has coached the team for 3 years and has 37 years of experience in wastewater operations. Veteran members John Dyer, Bill Shuck, and Clarence Scherich, were part of the team that took the title in Operations Challenge '93.

According to Operations Challenge Committee vice chair Clarence Kuykendall (who received a rousing cheer as he arrived in the ballroom with the competition results), the score HRSD received on the process control event lowered its overall score just enough to give the L.A. County team the edge it needed. The two teams were 3.1 points apart in the final tally.

Also strong in the Division I competition were the Gainesville Regional Utilities Reclaimers from Florida, who placed in the top five of each event and third overall, and the New England Synergistics, who placed in two events, won the process control event, and placed fourth overall. The Wastewater Rangers from Ohio placed fifth overall and second in the pump maintenance event.

The Division II overall winner was the HRSD Hurricanes. The team—Mike Brumley, Paul Leonard, Jeff Webster, Tom Wrenn, and coach George Gregory—also placed first in the laboratory competition and second in the safety event. Second place overall went to the Rocky Mountain Commode Commandos (sporting fatigues and combat boots), who also won the safety event.

Division II welcomed its first two



Perhaps with foreboding of the upset to come, Team HRSD studies the competition.



Newcomers from Toronto, Ontario, compete in the high-speed collection systems event.



Although they did not place in the laboratory event, the Rocky Mountain Commode Commandos won second place overall in Division II.



In the safety event, a rescuer must place a harness on a mannequin before pulling it from a manhole.

Canadian teams: the Humber Aerobic Club from Ontario, who won the Division II collection systems event, and the Ontario Highlanders, who dominated the Division II pump maintenance event. New York's Amherst Agitators overran the competition in the process control event, and the Chesapeake Bay Raiders, who finished third overall, placed in three events.

A Competition Fit for a King

The four spectator events took place on the WEFTEC exposition floor (the process control event was held in a quieter setting), with several teams competing simultaneously in each event. From 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., the 37 teams competed in all five events, while conferees cheered them on from all sides. As the day proceeded, the crowd grew consistently larger and by afternoon was so thick around the collection systems and pump maintenance events that the competitors could barely be seen. Onlookers fought for glimpses into the simulated manholes of the safety event in which rescuers harnessed mannequins and pulled them to safety before performing CPR. Although not as action-packed as the other three, the laboratory event also drew a sizable gathering.

In the afternoon, King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden dropped by for a look. Doug Miller, chair of the Operations Challenge Committee, explained the competition to His Majesty (see p. 20 where he offers *Forum* readers a similar explanation). Other dignified guests included past WEF president Phil Gerwert, who presented the final awards at the evening ceremony and spoke about the importance of the Professional Wastewater Operators Division to the Federation and the



The laboratory event requires teams to perform three procedures, which are announced the day before the competition.

industry. EPA's Rich Barber, who organizes the annual EPA awards for excellence in wastewater treatment, also made a presentation at the awards ceremony.

Challenges for the Future

The competition clearly has succeeded in its mission to encourage operator training. Many competitors underwent weeks of training and participated in local competitions to achieve the expertise required to win an event. According to Mike Harris of the HRSD Division I team, his team practiced 4 days a week after work and occasionally on days off. Many teams travelled great distances (the Challenge hosted its first Hawaiian team) to demonstrate these skills in Chicago.

What's in store for Operations Challenge '95? Will the L.A. Wrecking Crew return for its third consecutive victory (a feat so far only accomplished by its rival HRSD)? Will HRSD steal back the title? Or will a new champion emerge from the pack of highly skilled, experienced competitors?

Come to Miami in October and find out.

See p. 24 for individual event scores.

Top Ten Overall—Division I

Team	Seconds	Points
L.A. Wrecking Crew (Calif.)	2376.12	450.10
HRSD (Va.)	2770.88	447.00
GRU Reclaimers (Fla.)	2640.60	413.10
New England Synergistics	2452.78	406.00
Wastewater Rangers (Ohio)	2908.77	348.70
Who Cares (Calif.)	2953.81	327.00
Thoroughbreds (Ky.)	3748.06	286.20
Staten Island Skid Marks (N.Y.)	3621.98	264.00
Louisville Urban Assault (Ky.)	4234.52	191.90
Enviro Riders (Ariz.)	4699.30	124.60

Top Ten Overall—Division II

Team	Seconds	Points
HRSD Hurricanes (Va.)	3372.65	427.00
Commode Commandos (Rocky Mt.)	3573.50	423.30
Chesapeake Bay Raiders (Ches.)	3519.93	420.60
Austin Blues (Tex.)	3122.72	418.80
Humber Aerobic Club (Ont.)	3362.43	417.50
Amherst Agitators (N.Y.)	3137.69	415.40
Highlanders (Ont.)	4008.57	382.10
WREpresentatives (Ind.)	3682.77	380.00
Central States Pumpers	3628.73	370.70
The Main Drain (Ohio)	3675.44	366.80



Team HRSD won first place in the crowd-pleasing pump maintenance event, and second overall in Division I.



The author (left) explains the competition to King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden at this year's Challenge in Chicago.

Anatomy of the Challenge

.....

Douglas Lee Miller

The Operations Challenge first took place in 1988 at the WEF Annual Conference and Exposition in Dallas, Tex. Six Challenges and cities later, the competition is going strong and has proven a successful means of encouraging training and demonstrating operator skills (see p. 16 for coverage of this year's event).

Approximately 40 teams compete every year in two divisions. Division I is for teams in the top five overall winning positions the previous year and those in the top three of any individual event, plus any team that placed in Division II. All new competitors and previously competing teams not in the top position are in Division II.

The competition is comprised of the safety, laboratory, process control, collection systems, and maintenance events, each of which has one winner from each division. Overall winners from each division are selected on the basis of total scores from all five events.

The safety event involves the rescue of an unconscious victim (a mannequin) from the bottom of a manhole. (In past competitions, the event required the repair of a leaking chlorine tank.) Competitors must set up retrieval equipment, monitor the atmos-

phere in the manhole, retrieve the victim, and perform CPR.

In the laboratory event, each team must perform three or four laboratory procedures selected from a list of 10: a biochemical oxygen demand set up, chlorine residual testing, a fecal coliform count, the titration technique, pH meter use, analytical balance weighing, standard solution preparation, spectrophotometer use, dissolved oxygen analysis, and various laboratory calculations.

The process control event requires participants to answer 25 technical questions and three problem sets. Answers are judged on accuracy, methodology, participation, and speed. This event takes place in a room away from the open competition, although plans are being made to make it more visible to conference attendees.

The collection systems event has undergone several changes since the first Challenge. Originally, teams were required to identify various collection system problems from a video tape. In later years, teams had to repair and tap a clay pipe. Currently, the event requires competitors to replace a section of plastic pipe with a tee connection while water flows through it. The

event is judged on safety, final pipe integrity, and procedure.

In the maintenance event, competitors are required to check, adjust, and replace electrical and mechanical components of a positive displacement pump. Originally, the event involved a centrifugal pump and later a progressive cavity pump. Future events may use other types of equipment.

Keeping Score

Each team receives points for accuracy, safety, procedure, and speed. Errors are converted to time penalties and added to the elapsed time. The team with the shortest total time in an event is awarded 100 points, and the team with the longest total time receives zero points. Teams in between receive points according to their ranks.

Each team's event points are added for an overall score. An overall winner and event winners are selected for each division, and the winning team of the overall event in each division is invited to return to next year's WEFTEC to defend the title.

Douglas Lee Miller is chair of the WEF Operations Challenge Committee, which is comprised of volunteer members from around the U.S. Any WEF member may join the committee or be trained as competition judge.