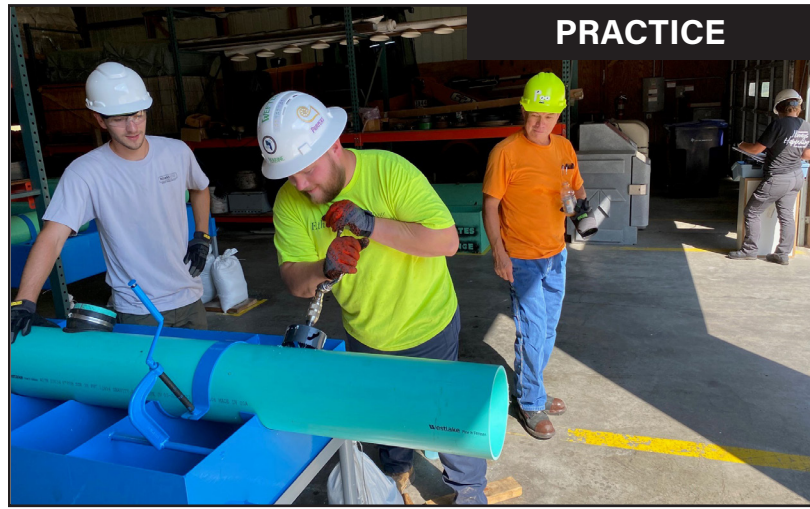


2023 WEFTEC 36th Annual Operations Challenge Competition



WEFTEC Now - October 3, 2023

Unison Solutions sponsored two teams from Central States Water Environment Association; the Pumpers and the Shovelers. The teams attended practice sessions the first week in September in preparation for the 36th annual competition.



The annual competition took place on Monday, October 2nd and Tuesday, October 3rd at the WEFTEC water quality event which was held at McCormick Place in Chicago, Illinois.

This competition pits the world's top water treatment talents against each other in a series of pulse-pounding, time-bound trials. Each four-person team represented a WEF Member Association or comparable operator organization and competed in one of three divisions based on their level of competition experience.

Teams earned an overall score based on their weighted performance in five classic Operations Challenge events, each testing a different aspect of work in the wastewater profession:

Process Control, Laboratory, Safety, Collection Systems, and Vaughan (Montesano, Washington) Maintenance.

Process Control Event

On Monday, teams completed the timed Process Control Event to test their mathematical aptitude and familiarity with wastewater treatment processes consisting of both written and electronic portions. For part of the trial, teams used a specialized wastewater treatment process simulator to visualize real-world problem scenarios and make real-time decisions to fix them.

Laboratory Event

The Laboratory Event called on teams to analyze a range of water quality parameters across a variety of settings — including influent, aeration basins, and effluent — more quickly than their opponents. The event required competitors to demonstrate their competence in such lab-based tasks as sampling, sample preparation, data collection, and data interpretation, as well as their familiarity with common laboratory equipment.

Safety Event

The Safety Event required teams to respond to a hypothetical emergency in which a co-worker had collapsed inside a maintenance shaft. Acting as a rescue team, competitors had to safely enter a confined space, retrieve the incapacitated co-worker, diagnose and fix a safety hazard within the confined space, and re-seal the maintenance shaft. For the first time, this year's Safety Event also included a scored virtual reality component, in which one member of each team used high-tech hardware to demonstrate their ability to properly select and handle the right tools for a rescue job.

Collection Systems Event

In the Collection Systems Event, teams vigorously bisected a stretch of 20-cm (8-in.) PVC pipe to fix a leak, connected a 10-cm (4-in.) lateral, and programmed an autosampler, all while water continued to flow through the pipe.

Vaughan Maintenance Event

Finally, competitors in the Vaughan Maintenance Event responded to a sanitary pumping station serving a busy downtown neighborhood that has become incapacitated by the buildup of fats, oils, and grease (FOGs). Teams completed normal maintenance tasks to diagnose problems at the FOG-clogged wet well, readjusted a conditioning pump, and replaced a damaged impeller and pump nozzle.

2023 Operations Challenge Winners

At an awards ceremony on Tuesday night, Operations Challenge officials announced this year's winners.



Division I Winners

- First Place – Controlled Chaos (Water Environment Association of South Carolina)
- Second Place – Centrifugal Force (Water Environment Association of Texas)
- Third Place – Elevated Ops (Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association)

Division II Winners

- First Place – Sludgehammers (Water Environment Association of Ontario)
- Second Place – Double Duty (Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association)
- Third Place – Rising Sludge (New England Water Environment Association)

Division III Winners

- First Place – Poopa Troopa (Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association)
- Second Place – Second City Sewer Crew (Illinois Water Environment Association)
- Third Place – Highland Creek Rabble Rousers (Water Environment Association of Ontario)

Spirit Award Winners

- Best Uniform – Bio-Wizards (Florida Water Environment Association)
- Best Hard Hat – Turdologists (Arizona Water Association)
- Best Team Photo – Water Bears (New York Water Environment Association)
- Team Congeniality – Tennessee Thunder (Clean Water Professionals of Kentucky-Tennessee)
- Best Fan Support – Special Forces (ACODAL Colombia)
- Best Effort – Severn-Trent Academy (Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management)
- Favorite Volunteer – Reggie Morgan
- Least Penalties – The Technicians (Chesapeake Water Environment Association) -- 90 seconds across four events

Bigger and Broader Than Ever

This year's Operations Challenge competition featured a record-shattering 55 teams, including more international teams than ever before. Operations Challenge 2023 hosted Severn-Trent Academy and the Helsinki Sewer Turdles, the first-ever teams representing the U.K. and Finland, respectively. Also competing in this year's competition were Special Forces — a new team from Colombia — as well as the return of the Poo Fighters from Germany and the Great Danes from Denmark. The Sludgehammers and Highland Creek Rabble Rousers, both from Canada, also returned for another year of cross-border competition.

More Details to Appear in WE&T

The December 2023 issue of Water Environment & Technology magazine will contain full coverage of this year's Operations Challenge competition.