

Operations Forum

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Cool-headed Commandos

HOT PLAYERS IN THE BIG EASY

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE 1999: Rocky Mountain High

Cathy Vidito

For the first time in 6 years, an Operations Challenge team from the Virginia or California Water Environment Association (WEA) did not win. The Rocky Mountain WEA Commode Commandos sized up the tough competition, namely the LA Wrecking Crew (top winners in 1993 to 1995 and 1997) and Team HRSD G-Force (top winners in 1996 and 1998), and struck with victorious results at the all-day event on Oct. 12 in New Orleans, La.



“I think our being able to adapt to last-minute changes in the events is instrumental in doing well,” says team captain Greg Farmer, who has been with the team since it first formed in 1993. “We also don’t let the competition consume us.”

While some might find the famed New Orleans nightlife distracting, the Commandos were energized by it. “We could be found out on Bourbon St. each night leading up to the competition,” Farmer says. “It’s important to stay loose.”

That’s not to say that being relaxed is the same as being undisciplined. The Commandos started practicing and training for the national competition in September. Training was performed 2 hours a day, 4 days a week, and more than half the practice time was uncompensated personal time.

Training Varies Among Teams

With the importance on speed, agility, and accuracy in the five Operations Challenge events — process control, maintenance, collection systems, safety, and laboratory — teams cannot afford to not know each procedure inside and out, and a lack of practice shows. Virginia’s Team HRSD G-Force began practicing twice a week for 2 hours a day, but because of work conflicts and flooding caused by Hurricane Floyd, they missed six out of 10 practices.

The Hawaii WEA Kauai Nitrifiers practiced three times a week for 1 to 2 hours a day over a period of 3 weeks. Chesapeake WEA’s Blue Plains Specials found time to practice once a week, three days a month. “Many team members received promotions, which made it difficult to coordinate,” says Blue Plains Specials captain Jim Charleton.

The Trouble with Training

Faced with downsized staff, cost-cutting measures, team members are finding it difficult to find time to practice when duty calls. When a road work contractor cut into a

No strangers to success, the Commandos have been champions of their local MA competition for 5 consecutive years and placed 2nd overall in Division 2 at their first national competition in 1994.

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE 1999

Top 10 Overall

Division 1	MA
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain
Connoisseurs	Arkansas
TRA CRWSers	Texas
Royal Flush	Ontario
LA Wrecking Crew	California
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	California
Precision Express	Pennsylvania
Team HRSD G-Force	Virginia
Team GRU	Florida
Prime Pumpers	Rocky Mountain
Division 2	MA
Bad Conducks	Pacific Northwest
Vermont Sewer Marines	New England
Austin Blues	Texas
Flush in the Pan	Ontario
Pump Fiction	New England
Hopewell Wild Cards	Virginia
Wood County Woodies	Ohio
Bowery Bowl Busters	New York
Blind Flanges	Pacific Northwest
MASS Demolition	New England

Facts about the Commode Commandos

They have had a female team member for all but 1 year.

They have competed every year since they formed in 1993.

In their first national competition in 1994, they placed 2nd overall in Division 2.

They have been champions of their local MA competition since 1994.

major collection system line, causing a major spill of untreated wastewater, Michigan WEA S.W.A.T. Team Captain Mike Brown was out of commission for 3 days. The team managed to practice once a week, 2 hours a day over a period of 6 weeks.

"Work gets in the way of practice," is the way Norm Domingo of the California WEA 24-Hour Composites succinctly puts it. He says because of work responsibilities, the Composites met very little as a team.

Still, one can get too much of a good thing, even training. Perhaps overwork is what held back the Mississippi WEA OMI Renegades, who practiced 2 to 3 hours every day for 3 weeks. And besides their state competition, the Renegades flexed their muscles at a southern regional competition Sept. 18 in Dallas, Texas.

"We were more ready last year," said Gerry Williams after his team completed the first 3 events. In 1998 the Renegades were forced to stay home and clean up after Hurricane Georges, a disappointment that was "bummer city," Williams says.

Overcoming Unfamiliarity with Equipment

Besides teams unable to find sufficient time to practice, those unable to



Team HRWTF Wild Cards of the Virginia Water Environment Association prepares for the Safety event in which they placed third in Division 2.

Collection Systems Event

Division 1	MA	Time
LA Wrecking Crew	California	126.81
Tampa Eliminators	Florida	131.85
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	California	137.35
Connoisseurs	Arkansas	150.38
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	152.50
Division 2	MA	Time
Liquidators	South Carolina	134.22
Wood County Woodies	Ohio	134.97
Louisville Sludgers	Kentucky-Tennessee	148.31
Pump Fiction	New England	153.78
Blue Plains Specials	Chesapeake	154.57

Laboratory Event

Division 1	MA	Time
Team GRU	Florida	816.22
TRA GRWSers	Texas	901.00
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	931.72
Connoisseurs	Arkansas	950.22
Team HRSD G-Force	Virginia	959.80
Division 2	MA	Time
CPW Avengers	South Carolina	873.74
Team Inertia	Virginia	908.01
Vermont Sewer Marines	New England	913.39
Columbia Activators	Missouri	960.90
Flush in the Pan	Ontario	974.25

practice on the equipment actually used in the national competition events are at a disadvantage. The southern regional competition, hosted this year by the Trinity River Authority of Texas at the Central Regional Wastewater System Plant in Dallas, was set up partly to give smaller teams this opportunity, according to Rick Barger of the Little Rock (Ark.) Wastewater Utility and Arkansas WEA Connoisseurs. Six teams from Mississippi, Missouri, Texas, and Kentucky competed in

events similar to those at the national competition.

"The regional competition helps because it's difficult to practice on, say, a different pump," says OMI Renegades team captain Andy Garrett.

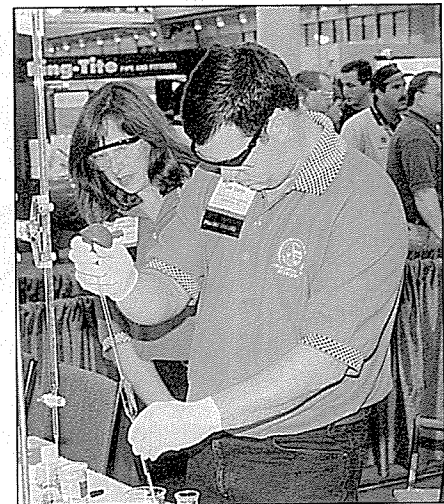
Other teams whose member associations (MAs) do not participate in a regional competition and cannot afford to borrow equipment (shipping costs can be prohibitively high) find other ways to make do, which is the long-lasting benefit of participating in

Operations Challenge. "We designed our own pipes," says Guy Moriguchi of the Kauai Nitrifiers. "You learn little tricks."

Acknowledgements

The Water Environment Federation would like to thank the following companies' contributions to Operations Challenge 1999:

Acadian Ambulance & Air Med Service
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 Equip Solutions
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 Godwin Pumps of America Inc.
 Headworks Inc.



Patty McLaughlin (left) and Sam Baker (right) of Team CPW Avengers (South Carolina Water Environment Association) complete a titration in the Laboratory event and come out as the Division 2 winners.

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Maintenance Event

Division 1	MA	Time
Highlanders	Ontario	465.25
TRA CRWSers	Texas	517.36
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	California	527.78
Royal Flush	Ontario	536.22
Connoisseurs	Arkansas	547.88
Division 2	MA	Time
CPW Avengers	South Carolina	589.28
Flush in the Pan	Ontario	621.47
Blue Plains Specials	Chesapeake	638.72
Austin Blues	Texas	647.09
Wood County Woodies	Ohio	670.15

Process Control Event

Division 1	MA	Time
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	1089.16
Connoisseurs	Arkansas	1574.72
Team HRSD G-Force	Virginia	1718.87
Precision Express	Pennsylvania	1790.25
Tampa Eliminators	Florida	1811.13
Division 2	MA	Time
Bad Conducks	Pacific Northwest	1501.50
Pump Fiction	New England	1595.00
S.W.A.T. Team	Michigan	1764.72
Blind Flanges	Pacific Northwest	1804.00
Bowery Bay Bowl Busters	New York	1840.00

Safety Event

Division 1	MA	Time
Highlanders	Ontario	374.53
Team HRSD G-Force	Virginia	400.18
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	California	453.46
Royal Flush	Ontario	471.75
Connoisseurs	Arkansas	486.78
Division 2	MA	Time
Austin Blues	Texas	492.63
Vermont Sewer Marines	New England	503.53
Hopewell Wild Cards	Virginia	534.71
Flush in the Pan	Ontario	540.47
Bad Conducks	Pacific Northwest	546.37

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 Uponor ETI
 USFilter
 Vaughan Co. Inc.
 WSI

Operations Challenge Event
 Coordinators
 Committee Chair
 Robert Rutherford
 HRSD, James River Plant
 Newport News, Va.



A judge carefully scrutinizes the Columbia Activators' (Missouri Water Environment Association) progress as they replace and repair a rotating assembly on a Gorman-Rupp centrifugal pump in the Maintenance event.

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE 1999



John Bennet (left) and Steve Price (right) of Team TRA CRWSers (Texas Water Environment Association) cut and prepare a repair piece for a PVC pipe in the Collections event, placing third overall in Division 1.

Vice-Chair

John Hart
Robinson Manufacturing
Oxford, Maine

Collection Systems

Larry Knight
Fay Spofford & Thorndike
Boston, Mass.

Laboratory

Charlene Givens
Givens & Associates Wastewater Co.
Cumberland, Ind.

Process Control

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Safety

Jeff Pratt
Alexandria Sanitation Authority
Alexandria, Va.

Scoring

David Vogel
OMI
Richmond, Va.

The trophies for each event were designed by the following individuals:

Collections

John Hart
Robinson Manufacturing
(Oxford, Maine)

Laboratory

John Palladino
Corning, Inc. (Corning, N.Y.)

Maintenance

Brad Beeching and Joy Varughese
Trinity River Authority
(Dallas, Texas)

Process Control

Bill Shuck
Los Angeles (Calif.) County
Sanitation Districts

Safety

Donnie Cagle
City of Franklin, Va.

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