

IDEA OF THE MONTH:

Up the Ladder

By Ted J. Rulseh

Jim Meehan's reasoning is simple: Operators who are better schooled and have higher-level licenses help a treatment plant perform more effectively.

He and the leadership team at The Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority have launched an Operator Enhancement Program that encourages operators to pursue progressively higher levels of New Jersey state licensing. Meehan, executive director, devised the program with Bob Valent, plant superintendent. Andy Sasso, operations supervisor, runs the initiative day-to-day.

"When I came here in 2010, I felt it was important that we get our people licensed," Meehan says. "We had only one or two licensed operators. Under the Operator Enhancement Program, we built into the union contract three classifications of operator — Class 1, 2 and 3.

"They have increased duties across the plant as they go up the ranks to Class 1. The ultimate spot to reach is lead operator. Those people have basically the same duties as the shift supervisors. When a shift supervisor isn't there, the lead operator takes control of the plant and is paid a \$3 an hour premium during that time."

The program also raised the one-time stipend for earning each license level (from Class S-1 to S-4) from \$500 to \$700. "They can get up to \$2,800 in stipends just for getting the licenses," Meehan says. "We also pay for the schooling, and we hold it here to make it as convenient as possible." The authority works with the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Hudson County Vocational School. Operators from other clean-water authorities are allowed to attend.

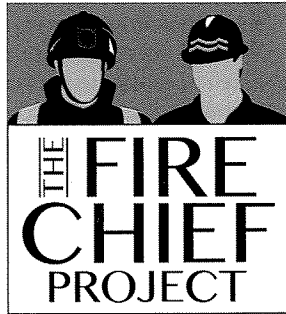
As of mid-2013, all nine plant operators had or were pursuing licenses, as were all three shift supervisors. In addition, all operators have received training toward black seal low-pressure boiler operator licenses from the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development. "We feel licensing is good for operators' personal development," says Meehan. "We also feel that well-informed operators who really understand what they're doing can only help the authority."

Licensing is also a great way to further the aims of The Fire Chief Project:

- **Raise clean-water operators to the stature of the fire chief**
- **Make kids grow up wanting to be clean-water operators**

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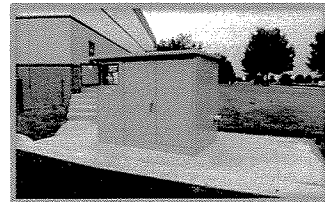
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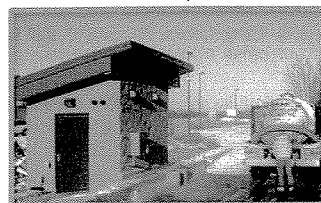
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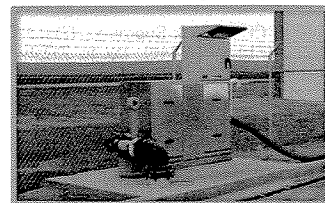
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