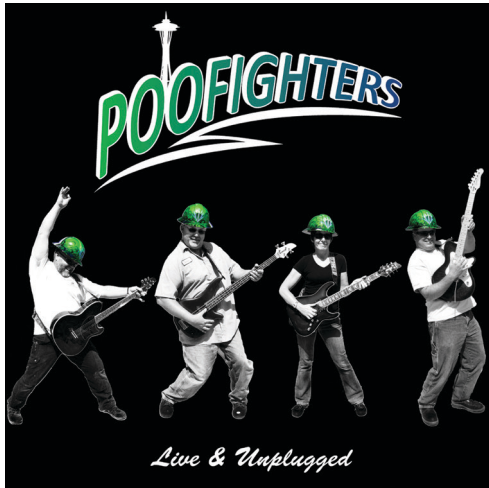


Clean Water U and Poofighters are developing our workforce

By Rachael Dillman, King County Wastewater Treatment Division

AT KING COUNTY Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD), when we can't find what we need, we make what we need—whether it's inventing a mechanical part to repair equipment, creating a brochure to explain a project to the public, or in this case, "growing our own" future employees.

As employees with rich, technical know-how head towards retirement, many utilities are finding it difficult to recruit and train new skilled people to take their place. WTD is competing with other agencies for quality candidates—and replacing employees is not the same as replacing experience. That's where tools like the new training facility at West Point and the Poofighters Ops Challenge team can help by "showing people what we do, and how it's done," said training supervisor Chad Clay.



The new training facility (a.k.a., "WTD Clean Water U") provides a safe space with the equipment to immerse people in things like confined space, lockout tagout (LOTO), lab, and mechanical maintenance. "We can give people hands-on

experience with pumps, blowers, safety procedures—all without hazards," Chad noted. It also includes multi-media resources like computers and a TV to show training videos.

"It's a solid training space where we can get folks up-to-speed quickly," said West Section manager Dan Grenet. The facility is used for testing potential hires, Poofighters' practice, certification training, and has the potential to be used for student programs.

WTD even invited other regional agency Ops Challenge teams to practice at Clean Water U in preparation for this year's Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association (PNCWA) conference and the Water Environment Federation WEFTEC conference.

"Practicing with the other teams not only makes us better, it helps us get to know other talent in our industry," explained Chad. "Networking with other agencies and participating in the regional and national events means more exposure and visibility to potential recruits. Job seekers see that working in wastewater can be dynamic, fun, and include a sense of teamwork."

The Poofighters are WTD's team at the international Operations Challenge at WEFTEC, the wastewater "Olympics" where they compete to test skills required to maintain and operate a treatment system. This September, the team is preparing to compete at the "playoffs" at PNCWA2013 in Bend, OR before the "Superbowl" on October 5 at WEFTEC 2013 in Chicago. Watch their Harlem Shake tribute to Chicago on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/ltAEqPrjh8U> and see more at <http://bit.ly/poofighters>.

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