Water Treatment Plants Honored

Local News

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Olympia, WA - When you flush the toilet or drain dirty dishwater down the sink into a sewer system, there are behind-the-scenes experts who take care of what you send down the drain. These professionals work around the clock to protect the health of our waters. They are our state’s wastewater (sewer) treatment plant operators. Most people don’t think about what goes on behind the scenes to protect our water, but the state Department of Ecology (Ecology) does because it regulates wastewater treatment plant operations. When Ecology sees perfect compliance at the plants, it recognizes the achievement with its annual Outstanding Wastewater Treatment Plant Awards.

Last year, a record-breaking 104 of the state’s wastewater treatment plants – or 37 percent of around 300 plants – had perfect track records. That’s up from the previous records of 92 in 2008 and 2009. The award-winning plants passed all environmental tests, analyzed all samples, turned in all state-required reports and avoided permit violations during 2010. Of particular note are the nine plants that achieved the honor for the first time. They are: Community of Dryden Wastewater Treatment Plant in Chelan County. City of Castle Rock Wastewater Treatment Plant in Cowlitz County. Moses Lake Sand Dunes Wastewater Treatment Plant in Grant County. City of McCleary Wastewater Treatment Plant in Grays Harbor County. Community of Dallesport Wastewater Treatment Plant in Klickitat County. City of Pateros Wastewater Treatment Plant in Okanogan County. Medical Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant and Reuse Facility in Spokane County. Chewelah Wastewater Treatment Plant in Stevens County. Boston Harbor Wastewater Treatment Plant in Thurston County. For a complete list by county of the state’s outstanding wastewater treatment plant award winners for 2010, go to our website (http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/op_cert/kudos.html) “Perfection in the wastewater treatment world is not easy,” said Poppy Carre, who manages the Ecology program that certifies wastewater treatment plant operators. “There are challenges every day, ranging from equipment breakdowns to huge rainstorms that flood the system. The plant operators are skilled and dedicated professionals who carry out necessary services for the clean water our state enjoys. We are thrilled to see a record number of plants achieving 100 percent compliance for 2010.” The state’s operator certification program and state financial assistance keep the program going strong. Ecology expects to offer approximately $61 million in grant and loan funding for 20 wastewater treatment facility projects for fiscal year 2012. The funding comes from dedicated environmental accounts and the state building and construction account. In 2010, Washington plants received $50 million in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds and $46 million in State Revolving Fund loans. Ecology’s award program has helped inspire big improvements in operation of treatment plants statewide. Before it began in 1995, only 14 treatment plants out of Washington’s 283 plants had perfect compliance. # # # What do wastewater treatment plants do? Wastewater treatment (sewer) plants collect household sewage and industrial wastewater from large networks of underground sewer pipes all day, every day. They treat the sewage and then discharge clean, treated water into waterways or spread the water onto land. There are approximately 300 wastewater treatment

plants in Washington. How does the state regulate them? Ecology monitors each plant’s effectiveness by requiring they meet conditions of permits that limit the contaminants the plants may discharge into lakes, rivers or marine waters or onto the ground. Plant operators must be certified (http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/op_cert/index.html) by the state and follow the requirements of their state permits. Ecology reviews every treatment plant’s tests, reports, and on-site inspections to determine which facilities met all conditions of their permits. **Contact:** Sandy Howard, communications manager, 360-407-6408 (desk); 360-791-3177 (cell); sandy.howard@ecy.wa.gov **For more information:** Wastewater operator certification program (http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/op_cert/index.html) Learn how you can help protect Washington’s waters (http://www.ecy.wa.gov/washington_waters/)