



NEWS RELEASE

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City recognizes Sinking Creek Plant Operations Team with STARS Award

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – There are some things that aren't meant to be done alone. In fact, they can't be done alone. They require a concerted team effort to be accomplished. That is the case with a team of City employees who work at the Sinking Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. On May, 7, 2015, Mayor Shane McFarland recognized the team of employees with the STARS award for Outstanding Performance.

"Water is a precious resource," said Mayor McFarland. "Without water we can't survive. We want to recognize the importance of the hard work and dedication of the Sinking Creek team for making sure that our City received certification under challenging circumstances."

The award stemmed from the team's performance in biological nutrient removal, specifically phosphorous and nitrate. While most people don't understand the science behind wastewater treatment, City Water & Sewer Department Director Darren Gore emphasized that what the Plant achieved was a "significant accomplishment."

In essence, the Sinking Creek Operations Team achieved a goal that even state regulators doubted could be done with the Sinking Creek Plant.

"The State of Tennessee a few years ago changed the goal line which required the Sinking Creek Plant to meet a whole new set of standards, including a new phosphorus rule, said John Strickland, Sinking Creek Wastewater Plant Manager. "The Sinking Creek Plant is not designed to treat phosphorous."

Meeting the new standards were required in order for the Plant to receive a new permit for treating effluent water. Initially, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) didn't think it was feasible based on the older Plant's past performance. For thirteen years, the plant had operated one way but the new standard forced operators to do it totally different.

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“It was a pretty tough situation because it was almost a one shot,” said Strickland. “It was literally one shot we had at a certain period of time to accomplish specific numbers and it’s amazing that we did it.”

The Sinking Creek Plant team came up with a plan and executed it. Treatment efficiency for Nitrates would have to double and efficiency for Phosphorous would have to increase by 70 percent, even though the Plant was not designed to treat Phosphorus at all.

“This required continuous monitoring hour-by-hour, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week for months and months on end. I can tell you that it was tiring and fatigue but at the end we enjoyed success, stressed Strickland.”

Phosphorous treatment efficiency was increased 100 percent. In addition, changes in operation saved over \$130,000 in electricity costs in one year.

The successful team effort not only enabled the Sinking Creek Plant to receive a necessary permit to continue operating but the Plant was also recognized with the Plant of the Year Award. For its effort, the Sinking Creek Plant won the 2014 William Hunter Owen Award for Outstanding Wastewater Treatment Plant from the Tennessee Water and Wastewater Association.

“What it really involved was staff dedication. The staff really had to be dedicated because we asked them to do something that they’d never done before,” added Strickland. “We asked them to use the same Plant to accomplish a goal that had never been done. I’m very proud of the staff for putting in the extra effort and the extra monitoring, all the extra time to make it work.”

Congratulations to the Sinking Creek Operations Team for being named recipients of the STARS Award for Outstanding Performance.

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Photo attached captions:

Sinking Creek Treatment Plant Operations Team

- 1. L/R Back Row: John Strickland, Darren Gore, Anthony Pollock, Josh LeMay, Patrick Dwyer.
LR Front Row: Josh Smith, Tony Patterson, Chuck LeMay, Daryl Williams.*
- 2. STARS Logo*