

City of Bloomington Utilities Department

Wastewater Treatment Labor-Management Committee

Annual Report to the Utilities Service Board

August 29, 2001-September 30, 2002

Submitted: December 15, 2002

In Remembrance

John Mason Ream, a charter member of the City of Bloomington Utilities Department, Wastewater Treatment Labor-Management Committee, died on April 9, 2002. John worked tirelessly to improve our workplace through his participation on the LMC. His vision continues as an inspiration to all of us.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report of the City of Bloomington Utilities Department (CBU) Wastewater Treatment Labor-Management Committee (LMC). The LMC held its first meeting on August 29, 2001.

BACKGROUND

The City of Bloomington Utilities Department Wastewater Treatment Labor-Management Committee was created in response to a proposal tendered by a majority of management and union-eligible employees at the Dillman Road and Blucher Poole wastewater treatment plants. The purpose of the proposal was to respond to a February 5, 2001 Utility Service Board (USB) Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking professional management services for the City of Bloomington's two wastewater treatment plants. The employee proposal was submitted to the USB in June 2001 and accepted in July 2001.

Members of the committee who submitted the proposal included: Harold Crittenden, Dillman Road plant operator; Steve Drake, interim Dillman Road plant manager; Tim Erwin, President, AFSCME, Local 2487; Ted Flynn, superintendent, Blucher Poole plant; Danny McConnel, Dillman Road utilities maintenance coordinator; Sarah Schwartzel, Dillman Road plant operator; Tony Walden, Blucher Poole mechanical equipment operator; and Kevin Williams and John Wright, Dillman Road plant maintenance mechanics.

The proposal suggested the creation of a labor-management committee as a vehicle for making decisions not reserved to CBU management and/or the union. The LMC consists of four union members and four management members. The superintendent and one shop steward from each plant serve as permanent (ex-officio) members of the committee

Members of the original LMC were: Scott Dompke, Steve Drake, Ted Flynn and John Langley representing management, and Rose Harden, John Ream, Sarah Schwartzel and Tony Walden representing the union.

The LMC by-laws were amended in June 2002 to allow for membership rotation.

LMC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

At its second meeting on September 5, 2001, the LMC began the process of defining its operating procedures and setting goals for the year. After discussion at several early meetings, it was agreed that the committee would operate on the basis of consensus rather than by majority vote. Consensus means that the opinions and convictions of all members must be heard and reconciled before a decision is made. Decisions do not go forward until the committee as a whole arrives at consensus.

The committee's initial goals were:

1. Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for both plants
2. Develop computerized maintenance management systems for both plants
3. Increase employee control of and responsibility for plant operations
4. Identify opportunities to improve managerial leadership practices. *Note:* The committee decided to defer action on this goal until all of the open management positions in administration and at the plants had been filled.

Other goals included initiating cost-saving measures throughout CBU wastewater operations, improving the efficiency of wastewater resource utilization, reviewing and improving safety measures, optimizing employee training, and establishing ways to involve all wastewater employees in the operation of the LMC.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

To begin the process of establishing SOPs, the LMC arranged presentations from professional engineering firms. Brown and Caldwell, United Water, Greeley and Hansen and Malcolm-Pirnie submitted proposals. Each of the vendors stressed the need for employee participation in the development of SOPs. The LMC concluded that the cost of professional preparation of SOPs was prohibitively high. For these two reasons, the LMC agreed to attempt to develop and implement SOPs with minimal assistance from outside consultants. As this report is written, draft SOPs for each plant have been completed and editing of the documents is underway.

COMPUTERIZED MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The LMC established a sub-committee of plant operators and maintenance personnel to review plant operations software in the latter part of 2001. Members attended a technical presentation on plant operation software products in Greenwood, Indiana, and visited the Ellettsville wastewater treatment plant to examine the OPS32 software package in use there. The OPS32 software uses plant data collected by a SCADA system to develop standard plant operations reports. Some versions of the software are also used in developing customized reports and trend analyses.

The LMC also invited CBU chemist, Craig Abbott to present laboratory needs to the committee for assessment. Abbott is currently reviewing the OPS32 software to explore its applications in the lab.

SCADA UPGRADES AND MASTER PLAN

Installation of the OPS32 software has been significantly delayed because upgrades to the existing SCADA systems at Blucher Poole and Dillman Road are necessary to accommodate the new software. LMC members and other employees brought SCADA problems to the attention of management representatives during LMC meetings. At present, SCADA upgrades are planned at both treatment plants. HNTB Engineering of

Indianapolis has been retained by CBU to complete a SCADA master plan for all CBU facilities. Upon completion of the master plan and the SCADA equipment upgrades, OPS32 software will be purchased and installed. After OPS32 is installed, HNTB will continue to develop reporting and observation capabilities of the system, independent of the OPS32 software program.

INCREASED EMPLOYEE CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY

Through the impetus of the LMC, numerous efforts have been undertaken to increase the involvement of all wastewater treatment employees in the operations affecting them. For example, the LMC formed a purchasing sub-committee to optimize cost savings on materials, supplies and chemicals used at CBU wastewater treatment plants. LMC members, staff of the CBU Purchasing Department and other employees from Dillman Road and Blucher Poole studied purchasing histories at both plants. They found a number of opportunities for cost savings, many of which have already been implemented. In addition to Tony Walden, non-LMC members of this sub-committee included Danny McConnel, Bob Johnson, Dwight Deckard and Terry Jo Fluke.

Additionally, the union component of the LMC conducted an all-employee meeting at the Dillman Road plant to emphasize the importance of rank and file participation in development and implementation of SOPs. This meeting was very successful in increasing employee participation in the SOPs project. Union employees also have conducted other all-employee meetings to inform co-workers at both treatment plants of LMC activities.

Finally, the LMC conducted an employee needs-assessment survey to identify employee concerns. The needs-assessment also explored how employees at each plant felt about their ability to communicate with their immediate supervisors.

LMC TRAINING ACTIVITIES

In October 2001, the LMC participated in a retreat at Twin Lakes Lodge. One purpose of the retreat was to explore how different personalities engage in problem solving. The basics of group decision-making were also explored. Facilitator Lee Balliet conducted the training session.

A second retreat was held in May 2002 at Riddle Point on Lake Lemon. LMC members used the retreat as an opportunity to review accomplishments and to discuss future priorities as well as to discuss the amendment of committee by-laws. Jean Joque, training coordinator for the City of Bloomington Employee Services Department, conducted a two-hour session on personal choices that affect workplace attitudes. LMC members found the presentation valuable and recommended that Joque's presentation be repeated at the Dillman Road and Blucher Poole plants.

In May 2002, LMC members Langley, Drake and Walden attended the National Labor Management Conference that is conducted bi-annually by the Federal Mediation and

Conciliation Service. The attendees found the conference valuable in evaluating the LMC's first-year performance as compared to other labor-management groups in the United States. They noted that many organizations across the country, both public and private, have successfully used the LMC process to address both labor and management issues.

OTHER PROJECTS

Gain sharing. A pilot gain sharing project was completed at the Dillman Road plant during the year. Plant employees from maintenance and operations worked across traditional departmental lines to achieve substantial savings in solids handling costs.

Wet weather over several years had resulted in a build-up of sludges in storage. In an effort to catch up, CBU rented a sludge press at a cost of over \$18,000 per month. Dillman employees proposed an alternative plan that accomplished the catch-up goal without the rental and chemical costs associated with press operation. While the project fell 12 percent short of its projected tonnage, a significant cost savings was realized. After legal details were worked out with the City administration, one-half of the savings realized from the project was distributed to participating employees.

Benchmarking. The LMC established a benchmarking sub-committee to conduct analysis at both wastewater treatment plants. The objective of the project was to develop analytical tools that measure the success or failure of efficiency goals. Initial meetings of this sub-committee indicated a need for training in benchmarking techniques. The sub-committee is currently reviewing benchmarking training options, both locally and nationally.

Other Sub-committees. One of the unique attributes of a labor-management committee is that it reaches out into the workplace to involve non-committee members in accomplishing its goals and objectives. Below is a roster of CBU employees who assisted with various committee projects during the reporting period.

Training

Steve Drake, Steve Glasgow
Sarah Schwartzel

Co-Op Purchasing

Dwight Deckard, Terry Jo Fluke,
Bob Johnson, Danny McConnel

SOPs and Maintenance

Dwight Deckard, Bob Johnson,
Jon Martin, Danny McConnel
John Ream, Sarah Schwartzel,
John Wright

Benchmarking

Steve Drake, Ted Flynn, Steve Glasgow
John Ream, Sarah Schwartzel

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Steve Drake, Rose Harden
John Langley, Tony Walden

Lab Operations

Craig Abbott, Dwight Deckard
Steve Drake, Sarah Schwartzel

SUMMARY

Most LMC members readily agree that creating a forum for labor-management communication has proved valuable in identifying and resolving plant problems and for dispelling myths that sometimes emerge in the workplace. Representatives of both union-eligible and management interests have made a genuine effort to openly talk about problems related to policies, equipment and other issues. We are happy to report that there is a bona-fide desire to work cooperatively for solutions to our mutual concerns.

For the coming year the LMC, in addition to continuing work on its current goals, has agreed to:

1. Establish functioning safety committees at both plants
2. Conduct a follow-up employee needs-assessment survey
3. Address cost-saving and resource utilization issues
4. Resume discussion of management leadership training opportunities
5. Initiate networking with similar labor-management committees