

Promoting Environmental Justice as an Essential Best Management Practice for Utilities in Economically Distressed Communities

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“It isn’t what the world holds out for you... but
what you bring to it!”

L.M. Montgomery






Wastewater Managers Have A
Tremendous Challenge...

And Opportunity, To Improve Things!

Wastewater Managers can Make a Positive Difference By:

- Optimizing Water Quality
- Minimizing Odors
- Achieving Cost Efficiencies to Reduce Rates
- Reducing Carbon Footprint, and Other Green Initiatives



These challenges, and opportunities, are especially prevalent for wastewater utilities operating in economically distressed communities...like Camden City, NJ

Camden City, NJ

- One of the poorest cities in the nation
- One of the highest rates of violent crime in the nation
- Poor urban planning (little separation between residential community and industry)
- Aging infrastructure (sewer system is over 100 years old)

Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA)

- Services 500,000 customers in Southern New Jersey
- Design Flow: 80 MGD
- Average Flow: 58 MGD
- Secondary, pure oxygen activated sludge treatment
- Discharges to Delaware River



Initial Conditions

- CCMUA obliged to raise rates by $22\frac{1}{2}\%$, from \$275 per household to \$337
- Numerous odor complaints from neighboring residents

Odor Prevention- ➡ Change Institutional Culture

- Closed odorous sludge composting facilities
- Odor inventory by independent consultant
- Installed new odor control systems at plant headworks
- Imposed zero tolerance policy with respect to odors from carelessness (doors left open; odor systems left off, etc)
- Increased supervision, especially on weekends
- Numerous outreach attempts to neighboring community to improve relationship

Happy Ending ... or a New Beginning

- Odor prevention established as a core priority
- No longer the “ceiling” goal, but the new “floor”
- CCMUA now looked for other opportunities to help the community



Environmental Justice Initiatives

- Reduced rates for Camden City residents
- Elimination of truck traffic
- Creation of a waterfront park
- Creation of a Community tree nursery



Environmental Justice Initiatives (Cont.)

- Combined sewer overflow system improvements
- Federal Grant Assistance to the City
- Provision of Technical Assistance to the Community

Camden SMART

- Collaborative among NJDEP, NJ Tree Foundation, Rutgers, CCMUA, Camden City and Cooper's Ferry Partnership to reduce flooding citywide
- 30 Rain Gardens and 1000 trees planted
- Water conservation ordinance adopted
- Combined sewers replaced and rehabilitated
- Increased oversight of operations and maintenance

Camden Collaborative Initiative

- Collaboration among USEPA NJDEP, CCMUA, Camden City and 25 other environmental and community agencies, to address environmental issues.
- Six working groups formed
 - Flooding
 - Contaminated Sites
 - Air Emissions
 - Recycling
 - Environmental Justice
 - Environmental Education

Flooding

- Water Conservation Ordinance Adopted
- Green Infrastructure
- Optimization of Operations & Maintenance
- Capital Improvements

Contaminated Sites

- Identification of best opportunities for redevelopment
- Identification of best opportunities for green space preservation

Air Emissions

- Identification of most significant discharges
- Development of BMP's for each industry to cost effectively minimize impacts from emissions
- Green ports initiative with USEPA
- Development of mobile sources strategy

Recycling

- Revised Camden City recycling specification
- Developing Camden City school recycling challenge



Environmental Justice

- Developed sustainability/environmental justice ordinance
- Creating four riverfront parks to provide riverfront access to residents



Environmental Education

- Developed environmental resource guide for Camden Schools
- Established Camden Green Ambassadors Internship Program

The "Cost" of Environmental Justice

- Did improved environmental performance result in cost increases or rate increases?

NO!

- Most initiatives not only improved environmental performance but also reduced cost as well
- Other Environmental Justice initiatives were generally low cost/high impact



Doing the Right Thing is Also the Smart Thing

- Reduction of regulatory liability, fines, etc.
- Reduction of liability to litigation from residents
- Improvement in public perception

Thanks for Listening!

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