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DWD, DNR Collaborate on New Apprenticeship Program Specializing in Wastewater Treatment Plant Operation

Statewide program the first of its kind in the nation, third developed under SAGE initiative

LA CROSSE – A pioneering apprenticeship program unveiled today is designed to better meet the needs of Wisconsin employers and communities for skilled workers to run their wastewater treatment plants, state workforce and environmental officials say.

The new Wastewater Treatment Plant apprenticeship program, created through a partnership between the state Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards (BAS) and Department of Natural Resources (DNR), is the first program of its kind in the nation and the third launched in Wisconsin through a federal grant program focused on “greening up” the state’s apprenticeship program.

“We are pleased to offer this apprenticeship, which will help workers build skills that we know are in demand in communities across Wisconsin, said Jane Pawasarat, Administrator of DWD’s Division of Employment & Training, which includes BAS. “The program is designed to provide a comprehensive career pathway for workers in wastewater treatment plants of nearly every size. Through the apprenticeship program, we are connecting labor market needs with skilled workers and realizing our vision of making Wisconsin the workforce of choice.”

The Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator apprenticeship program was developed by BAS in partnership with the DNR, which certifies wastewater treatment plant operators and brought industry-specific knowledge to the table. The two agencies worked closely with multiple municipalities including members of the Wisconsin Water Operators’ Association (WWOA) in developing technical aspects of the program. The program is the first of its kind in the nation for wastewater treatment plant operation, and follows a new hybrid model in which apprentices are assessed on-the-job using a combination of time and competencies. BAS formally presented the new apprenticeship program today at the WWOA’s annual conference in La Crosse.

"With major investments in wastewater treatment plants over the past 30 years and now with many plant operators retiring, the apprenticeship program will ensure our treatment plants in the state are operated by a new generation of knowledgeable and competent operators. That will translate into better protection for our lakes and streams and cleaner waters," said Susan Sylvester, Director of the DNR's Water Quality Bureau.

Wastewater treatment plant operator apprentices will be in the program for three years and complete 432 hours of classroom instruction. The classroom instruction will be offered online by Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac. The program is expected to begin before year end, and is equipped for up to 70 apprentices.

The program is Wisconsin’s third new apprenticeship program made possible through the \$6 million Sector Alliance for the Green Economy (SAGE) project grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The purpose of SAGE is to employ short and long-term strategies critical to the greening of Wisconsin's workforce by forming partnerships with businesses, educators and other stakeholders to identify and address labor force needs specific to "green" or clean energy jobs in construction, manufacturing and utility industries. Wisconsin launched new apprenticeships in dairy grazing and substation electrician this year.

For more information: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/apprenticeship/default.htm>