

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE



Photos: Kieffer Photography

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56 TEAMS GO HARD-HAT-TO-HARD-HAT IN WATER SECTOR SKILLS SHOWDOWN

Justin Jacques with assistance from Steve Harrison and Jessica Rozek

Three divisions; six countries; 56 teams; 37 years. Many numbers can measure the magnitude of Operations Challenge, billed as the water sector's premier skills competition. But for more than 300 contenders this year, a single number took precedence over any other: first place.

Hailing from locales as nearby as New Orleans and as far-flung as Finland, this year's Operations Challenge field left it all on the WEFTEC® exhibition floor during five classic events that tested a range of water-sector skills: Process Control, Laboratory, Collection Systems, Safety, and Vaughan (Montesano, Washington) Maintenance.

Each four-person team represented a Water Environment Federation (WEF; Alexandria, Virginia) Member Association (MA) or comparable regional organization. To earn the right to represent their MA at WEFTEC, many teams had to triumph in regional competitions held year-round. In New Orleans, they competed in one of three divisions based on their level of competition experience, with veteran teams in Division I and newcomers in Division III.

"You can go anywhere in that conference. You can walk that ... exhibit hall. You can go into the technical sessions. You can go anywhere you want to," Jeff Sober, WEF Operations Challenge Community Chair, said during an awards ceremony on October 8. "You will meet dedicated water professionals, but you will not find the passion that exists in this industry until you go down to our competition." 🐾



CHALLENGE

2024



ELEVATED OPS RECAPTURES SUMMIT OF OPS CHALLENGE MOUNTAIN



Elevated Ops, representing Metro Water Recovery (Denver) and the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association, this year placed first in Division I for their third time. The team's victory brings them to a tie with Controlled Chaos from the Water Environment Association of South Carolina, who achieved their third Division I win at WEFTEC 2023. Kieffer Photography

After hoisting their third Division I victory this year, **Elevated Ops** — representing Metro Water Recovery and the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association (RMWEA) — returned home to Denver as one of the greatest Operations Challenge outfits of all time. The team features coach Lance Wenzholz and captain Kelsey Gedge, as well as Matthew Duncan, Joshua Mallore, and Jesse Turpin.

Their win etches Elevated Ops onto a short list of only four other teams ever to achieve at least three top-spot finishes since 1988 — the LA Wrecking Crew, the TRA CReWSers, Terminal Velocity, and **Controlled Chaos**, who joined the club after WEFTEC 2023. Still, the team refuses to rest on their laurels.

“I don’t want to disrespect something that has given me so much fulfillment and growth in my personal and professional life by placing ourselves in the same category as those legendary teams,” Gedge said. “The consistent excellence that those teams have demonstrated is something that we strive to emulate, and we recognize that none of this would be possible without the support of the management at Metro Water Recovery along

with the RMWEA and our sponsors.”

This year marks another milestone for Elevated Ops: It is the fifth year since 2019 that they have outsmarted every other team to secure first place in the Process Control Event. However, their overall success did not stem from individual strengths in any one event, but rather from a lack of weaknesses — the well-rounded team scored second-place finishes in every other event except for Lab.

Gedge expressed “a ton of respect” for Elevated Ops’ 10 other Division I competitors, each of whom motivates the team toward continuous improvement. Among other teams, this group includes such contenders as **Centrifugal Force** from the Water Environment Association of Texas, who finished second overall after field-leading performances in Lab, Safety, and Vaughan Maintenance; **Controlled Chaos** from the Water Environment Association of South Carolina, who placed third overall; and **NC One Water’s Smooth Operators**, who achieved the fastest time in the Collection Systems Event.

“Without them pushing us, we wouldn’t be where we are today,” Gedge said.

“It is a blast to compete with so many great teams and great people,” Duncan added. “Operations Challenge really is the ultimate tool for employee development, collaboration, and networking. We look forward to 2025 and what the future holds.”



Elevated Ops — Lance Wenzholz and captain Kelsey Gedge, as well as Matthew Duncan, Joshua Mallore, and Jesse Turpin (not pictured) — once again excelled in the Process Control Event, leading the field for their fifth year. The team also placed second in the Division I Collection Systems, Vaughan (Montesano, Washington) Maintenance, and Safety events. Kieffer Photography

BOWERY BAY COYOTES LEAD A CROWDED DIVISION II PACK

Since debuting their current team configuration in 2022, Astoria, New York’s **Bowery Bay Coyotes** — coach Anthony Quadrino, captain Chris Reyes, Paraminder Mander, Mike Nardozi, and Mike Prats — have been Division II landmarks. This year, first-place showings in the Safety and Vaughan Maintenance events afforded the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) team good reason for a victory howl.

“It’s our third year together as the Coyotes — I guess that was a good-luck charm this year,” Reyes said.

Judging by the Coyotes’ score in the Safety Event, fans would be forgiven for assuming the team cut their teeth in Division I rather than Division II. Their time of just over 5 minutes would have secured them third place in the Division I Safety Event, outpacing nine of Operations Challenge’s top teams.

If the Coyotes return next year, they will join Long Island’s **Brown Tide** as the second NYWEA representatives in Division I. And while team members confirmed their eagerness to take their place among the competition’s greats, they also acknowledged a tough road ahead. This begins with “opening up [their] brains a little more” to spend more time practicing the Lab and Process Control events, Reyes said.



First-place finishes in the Safety and Vaughan Maintenance events propelled the Bowery Bay Coyotes — coach Anthony Quadrino, captain Chris Reyes, Paraminder Mander, Mike Nardozi, and Mike Prats — to the top of the Division II standings. The team represents the New York Water Environment Association and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Kieffer Photography

“We’re happy with how we competed today,” said Quadrino, whom the rest of the Coyotes affectionally call “Grandpa.” “But we still have a lot to learn, and that’s the plan for next year in Division I. We’re there to learn how to do this from the best.”

“Division I is going to be very nerve-wracking, but it’s a long time coming,” Reyes added. “We’ve worked very hard for this, and we know we’re going to have to work even harder next year.”

For their victory, the Coyotes credited “unbelievable” support from NYWEA as well as a strong spirit of teamwork among its teams.

“Every team helps each other,” Prats said. “We’re close with the **Watertown Waterbears**. They come down to help us, and we do the same for them. We’re always teaching each other.”

Elsewhere among the 19 teams in Division II, the Illinois Water Environment Association **Second City Sewer Crew** — making an impressive Division II debut — finished first in the Process Control Event and second overall, while another Division II newcomer, Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association **Poopa Troopa**, finished third. The **Watertown Waterbears** scored highest in the Lab Event, and the **NC One Water Predaturds** logged another fast Collection Systems performance for back-to-back wins in the event.



The Bowery Bay Coyotes also placed third in the Division II Collection Systems Event, finishing in just under 2 minutes. With eyes toward debuting in Division I next year, the team plans to focus on perfecting their approach to the Lab and Process Control events. Kieffer Photography

CENTRAL STATES TEAM "PUMPED" FOLLOWING SURPRISE DIVISION III WIN



The Central States Water Environment Association Pumpers hoisted a Division III victory despite meeting in person for the first time only 2 months before Operations Challenge. Not only do coaches Pat Heineck and Marc Zimmerman, captain Chris Lefebvre, Justin Profancik, Alex Krause, and Kelsey Van Deusen work at different organizations, but they are spread across three U.S. states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Kieffer Photography

The Central States Water Environment Association (CSWEA) Pumpers triumphed over 26 other teams in Division III, boosted by a remarkable score in the Process Control Event that would have placed them among the top finishers in Division I.

Making their achievement even more impressive? The Pumpers — coaches Pat Heineck and Marc Zimmerman, captain Chris Lefebvre, Justin Profancik, Alex Krause, and Kelsey Van Deusen — met in person for the first time less than 2 months before WEFTEC.

This is not unusual for teams representing CSWEA, which fields their Operations Challenge rosters in a unique way. With membership throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois, CSWEA professionals become eligible to join either the Pumpers or Shovelers when they win their state's annual CSWEA awards for excellence in operations or collections.

This means each annual batch of Pumpers and Shovelers is unique, and given the

typical distances among the home facilities of the team members, opportunities for full-team practices are rare. This summer, the Pumpers and Shovelers gathered only twice at a facility in Janesville, Wisconsin, for a pair of intensive, 2.5-day practice sessions. In the meantime, individual team members prepared as much as they could independently, including spending "countless hours" studying for the Process Control test as well as practicing procedural steps for the Lab Event.

The Pumpers' spirits were high the night of October 7, Lefebvre said, following their successful Process Control and Lab performances. However, a handful of penalties during the next day's events shook their confidence.

"Our team was thinking that we didn't do enough to reach the podium," Lefebvre said, recalling the awards ceremony. "When the second- and third-place teams had been announced, we concluded that we must have finished fourth or fifth. When they announced our team, the reaction was pure shock and joy. I can't say enough about how proud I am of my teammates. They absolutely killed it!"

Other notable Division III finishers included the Water Environment Association of Ontario Weir Wolves, who were the top scorers in the Safety and Collections events and finished second overall. The New York Water Environment Association 26th Ward Notorious BOD took third overall, buoyed by a division-topping performance in Vaughan Maintenance. The Water Environment Association of Texas TRAILblazers placed first in the Lab Event.



The Pumpers achieved a brow-raising performance in the Process Control Event that would have placed the Division III team among the top finishers in Division I. The Pumpers also placed second in the Division III Lab Event, surpassed only by the Water Environment Association of Texas TRAILblazers. Kieffer Photography

SOUTHEAST TEAMS ANSWER CALL OF DUTY BETWEEN TWO HURRICANES

Although they may carry themselves like world-class athletes, at their core, Operations Challenge competitors are essential first responders who must make sacrifices in times of crisis. This responsibility loomed large during this year's competition, which was held between historically impactful hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Post-Helene recovery efforts and pre-Milton preparatory measures forced two teams — Lethal Concentration representing the Water Environment Association of South Carolina and the Dirty Birds of St. Pete representing the Florida Water Environment Association (FWEA) — to miss Operations Challenge. Other FWEA teams from regions within the projected path of Hurricane Milton, including the Bio-Wizards and The Fecal Matter, had to leave New Orleans early before the storm made landfall on October 9. Two NC One Water teams, the Smooth Operators and Predaturds, went directly from WEFTEC to parts of North Carolina devastated by Hurricane Helene to assist with cleanup.

Hurricane Helene reached its climax, bringing wind speeds as high as 220 km/h, just offshore from Florida's west coast. It caused record-shattering storm surge in the City of St. Petersburg — home of the Dirty Birds — that incapacitated the Northeast Water Reclamation Facility's motor control centers and backup generators for a week. Only days later, Hurricane Milton made landfall about 50 km south of the city, bringing another 46 cm of rain.

It was all hands on deck for the Dirty Birds and their co-



The Bio-Wizards and The Fecal Matter, both representing the Florida Water Environment Association, raced home in hopes of aiding preparation efforts before Hurricane Milton made landfall in central Florida on October 9. Kieffer Photography

workers, who worked tirelessly to make repairs and return the facility to compliance, said team member Doug LaRue. Participating in Operations Challenge, he said, had a noticeable effect on the team's cohesiveness during the crisis.

"Most of us work in different areas of the city, so we don't get to work alongside each other on a daily basis, but when we do, the teamwork and communication is much enhanced," LaRue said. "The project goes smoother and is more successful."

Their efforts helped return the facility to service in as little as 24 hours after Milton hit. While conditions still were far from normal as of mid-October, the worst had passed, and the Dirty Birds already had their sights set on their Operations Challenge return.

"We would like to thank everyone for their concern," LaRue said. "We are all safe, and we will see everyone next year in Chicago."

Back in New Orleans, teams endeavored to focus on the competition despite a steady stream of anxiety-inducing weather forecasts and damage reports.



Several teams were affected by hurricanes Helene and Milton, which made landfall in the Southeast U.S. just before and just after WEFTEC 2024, respectively. South Carolina's Lethal Concentration and Florida's Dirty Birds of St. Pete missed the competition altogether while four other teams prepared to assist hurricane response efforts directly after departing New Orleans. Getty Images



Roughly 2 weeks after Hurricane Helene tore a path of destruction from Florida through the Carolinas, water services in parts of western North Carolina still faced impairments. After Operations Challenge, the Smooth Operators and Predaturds, both representing NC One Water, joined response crews working around the clock to rebuild infrastructure and restore services. Kieffer Photography



The Smooth Operators were well-equipped to address pipeline damages following Hurricane Helene. The team achieved the fastest finishing time within the entire Operations Challenge field in this year's Collection Systems Event — 1 minute and 24 seconds. Kieffer Photography

The Bio-Wizards, who completed all five of their events on October 7 before racing back to Central Florida, noted that an intense rainy season already had heightened the water table and created conditions that could make Hurricane Milton more destructive. Members of the Bio-Wizards spent a weekend before WEFTEC donating tarps to surrounding communities in preparation for the storm.

"We're getting ready to deal with a direct hit from a Category 5 storm," Jeff Goolsby of the Bio-Wizards said. "Something like that could bring a 20-ft [6-m] storm surge. We're expecting most of Tampa to be underwater."

Members of the Smooth Operators and Predaturds were receiving reports from colleagues deployed to western parts of North Carolina in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains,



While other teams decompressed and reviewed their performances following the Process Control Event, The Fecal Matter from Jacksonville, Florida, was attempting to book last-minute return flights ahead of Hurricane Milton's arrival. Kieffer Photography

still in shambles 2 weeks after Hurricane Helene.

"It's complete devastation out there," said the Smooth Operators' Bryon Orr. "They have whole plants and even the roads to get to the plants totally washed out. Right now, they're just trying to get the roads in a condition to where we can access the plants by the time we get there."

On generator-supplied power and lacking running water, the teams prepared to join recovery crews residing in makeshift camps comprising cots packed into office buildings.

"Out there, they've got — I think — six pump stations where the wet wells and everything are gone. Other stations are missing piping and stuff. The main goal is to try to get those stations back in service," the Predaturds' Brett Fisher said. "We've rebuilt stuff before, but never to this extent." 🐾

Meet Incoming Operations Challenge Community Chair Kim Furry

Kim Furry, who will become Chair of WEF's Operations Challenge Community next year, has worn many hats since beginning her career as a chemist for the City of Van Wert, Ohio, in 1997.

"I started out in the wastewater lab and wanted to learn how the things I was doing in the lab impacted operations and the decisions operators made," Furry said. "So, I started doing training out in the plant and quickly fell in love with operators and what they do."



Kieffer Photography

That fascination led Furry to pursue operator roles at various Ohio treatment facilities, where she steadily climbed the ladder into supervisory positions. It also brought Furry to her first Operations Challenge competition in 2002. In the years since, she competed with an Ohio Water Environment Association team, judged various events, served as Lab Event coordinator, and eventually became Vice Chair of WEF's Operations Challenge Community. This year, Furry's daughter attended her first WEFTEC, where she facilitated the Lab Event. She was only 2 weeks old when Furry attended her first competition.

"The competition keeps growing bigger, particularly here on the national level," Furry said. "But I think the competition has also really grown in the skills it incorporates and the range of leadership skills that have been developed into the program."

During her term as Chair, Furry intends to shepherd the competition's continued growth. One priority is to revamp the Process Control Event in the coming years to increase individual participation, she said. 🐾

RETURNING VETERANS LOOK BACK ON PAST, AHEAD TO FUTURE

Operations Challenge 2024 marked a homecoming for Dave Leamer and John Hough, who last competed approximately 20 years ago as part of Sacramento Area Sewer District's (SASD) Division I Wastewater Warriors. This year, they returned to the fray as coaches of a new generation of SASD talent: the California Water Environment Association's SacSewer Unknown.

"We're hoping to get back where we were," Leamer said of the Division III team's ambitions. "We've got a good group of guys here, we're competitive, and we've got pride."

SacSewer Unknown — captain Wendell Duncan, Gabe Abalos, Nate Fua, and Chris Tikker — said Leamer and Hough's competition experience was indispensable during practices.

"Competing in Division I for a long time, we knew to look for those gray areas to find ways to speed up and still be doing things right," Leamer said. "So, I think that experience has given us some kind of advantage, because we're applying that old technique to this newer set of rules."

The Unknown were not the only new team with veterans at the helm. Ash Bledsoe last competed alongside Austin, Texas' Dillo Express roughly a decade ago. This year, he returned with a new Water Environment Association of Texas team, the Austin Basin Bandits, sharing coaching duties with Darrell Devooght. Members included captain Richard Rees, Tommy Gonzales, Chukwunonso Okpalaeze, and Enrique Quiroz.

"It's tougher than it used to be — especially the Process Control test," Bledsoe said, adding that the events have become more "equitable" and accessible to a wider range of water-sector skill sets. "I've been impressed with some of the changes that have been made."



Ed Choury experienced a different kind of homecoming this year. Rather than returning as a coach for a team of newcomers, Choury — who last competed nearly 20 years ago as a member of the Colorado-based Aurora's Ascending Aerobes — filled an unexpected opening in the roster of the Division I Sewerside Squad. The team, representing RMWEA and the City of Westminster, Colorado, featured coach and captain Lindie Aragon, Jesse Jones, and Ian Zawislak.

Choury said while the competition is "about 80% the same" as what he remembers, his personal performance is not as sharp as it used to be. Teammates disagreed, calling the veteran a vital addition to their team's dynamic.

"I'm learning a tremendous amount from competing alongside them," Choury said. 🐾

Ed Choury (second from left) last competed in Operations Challenge nearly 20 years ago. This year, he tested his brains and brawn once more as a member of the Division I Sewerside Squad, representing the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association. Choury was among several veteran Operations Challenge competitors who returned to WEFTEC this year. Kieffer Photography

GUARDIANS OF WATER BRING BRAZILIAN BUSTLE TO OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

While their arrival in New Orleans may have marked the first-ever appearance of a team from Brazil at Operations Challenge, members of ABES Brazil's Guardians of Water SABESP are no strangers to competition.

Coach Diego Corte, captain Reinaldo Carvalho, Fabio de Jesus, Rodrigo Biscalchim, and Sidney Almeida are perennial participants in Compeonato

de Operadores, an annual water-sector skills competition held for approximately 15 years by São Paulo-based SABESP — the largest water utility in Latin America. This year, the competition featured around 50 teams, all of whom work for SABESP.

The differences between the U.S. and Brazilian competitions are many, Corte said. For one, the SABESP competition features nine events instead of five. These include slightly different versions of the



The first-ever Operations Challenge team from Brazil made their debut at WEFTEC 2024. Guardians of Water SABESP, hailing from São Paulo, included coach Diego Corte, captain Reinaldo Carvalho, Fabio de Jesus, Rodrigo Biscalchim, and Sidney Almeida.
Kieffer Photography

U.S. events, such as a maintenance-based trial that involves aligning pumps and a collection systems-based event centering on connecting water services. Others are completely different, such as an event testing heavy machinery skills that tasks teams with operating a bulldozer. Like Operations Challenge, some events require four teammates to perform simultaneously. Others call for only one or two competitors.

Despite the team's experience, Corte says preparing for Operations Challenge was difficult. For one, the Brazilian versions of events such as Collection Systems and Safety involve radically different equipment. Language barriers were another obstacle — during the Process Control



Event, while the test was in Portuguese, the simulator was in English. The team also completed the test for the Lab Event in Spanish.

Nevertheless, the Guardians of Water — all of whom were visiting the U.S. for the first time — expressed excitement for the chance to plant a Brazilian flag on the Operations Challenge battlefield.

“It’s a joy and an honor [to represent Brazil in Operations Challenge], but it is also, at the same time, a responsibility,” Carvalho said through a translator. “We want to be the best and put the name of our country on top, but it’s also about networking as well as both professional and personal development.”

CHEERING, GREEN DRAGON SPOTTED ON OPERATIONS CHALLENGE SIDELINES



Veolia North America (Milwaukee) continues to grow its Operations Challenge footprint. The multinational environmental services provider, which supplies municipalities with full-service, contract-based water workforces, sponsored six teams this year.

Among them were the New York Water Environment Association **Digested Dragons**, making their WEFTEC debut. Members of the East Rockaway-based team included Joey Halik, Victor Estrella, Kevin Peterson, and Maaz Hafeji.

The Digested Dragons, a first-time team representing Veolia North America (Milwaukee) and the New York Water Environment Association, brought with them an unofficial mascot — Veolia North America Communications Manager Lauren Sternberg, also known as “Mother of Dragons.”
Kieffer Photography

The Digested Dragons turned heads at Operations Challenge, placing within the top five in the Division III Safety and Vaughan Maintenance events. Perhaps the most spirited member of their cheering section was “Mother of Dragons” — otherwise known as Veolia North America Communications Manager Lauren Sternberg — dressed in a winged, green dragon costume evoking the spirit of her namesake “Game of Thrones” character.

Sternberg became the team’s unofficial

mascot during an internal Operations Challenge competition between Veolia teams that took place last year in New York.

“On the last day, I surprised them by walking in for our little awards ceremony dressed in this outfit,” Sternberg said. “My son, who was then 8, made a trophy for them out of a piece of pipe that was painted, so I was presenting the trophy to the winning team.”

New Pipe Tower Prompts Teams to Retool Collections Tactics

This year, a refreshed Collection Systems Event challenged teams to assemble a Victaulic (Easton, Pennsylvania) pipe tower rather than program an autosampler. This new component forced longtime Operations Challenge participants to revisit their approaches to the competition’s highest-energy event.

Many teams made only minor tweaks to their strategy, assigning one team member who previously handled the autosampler to the new pipe tower.

“The people who do the cutting and the hole sawing, they’re in the same position,” said Ronald Sims, who assembled the tower for the Chesapeake Water Environment Association **Team Blue Wave**. “It just required one of us to learn something different, but our strategy stayed pretty much the same.”

NC One Water’s **Smooth Operators**, who achieved a field-leading finishing time of 1 minute and 24



This year’s Collection Systems Event tasked teams with assembling a Victaulic (Easton, Pennsylvania) pipe tower rather than programming an autosampler, as in past competitions. Many participants praised this substitution despite reporting difficulties in adapting their approaches to the event.
Kieffer Photography

seconds, took a different tack.

“One person *could* take care of the tower, and we know a lot of teams are using just one person,” said the Smooth Operators’ Adam Garris. “We found we could do it with two people instead, and that really gets it out of the way quick so those two people can get back and help with the rest of the event.”

While strategies and success rates varied, nearly all competitors called the pipe tower addition a welcome improvement.

“On the tower, you can build it as fast as you physically can,” said Mathew Hazelwood of the Iowa Water Environment Association **Reclaimers**. “On the autosampler, you were limited to the electronics.”

“You’re going from just pressing buttons to actually building something,” added Rylee Schoo of the Central States Water Environment Association **Shovelers**, who assumed tower duties for her team. “It makes you feel more important!”

DIVISION I RIVALS THOMPSON AND BYRNE JOIN FORCES IN GERMANY

Top, Rory Byrne of Controlled Chaos (left) and Jeremy Thompson of Centrifugal Force both have represented teams at the top of Division I for several years. Bottom, Byrne and Thompson competed this spring in Germany's World Water Skills Competition as a two-member team. Kieffer Photography

Every 2 years, the IFAT Munich conference brings together Europe's top water-sector talents for the World Water Skills Competition (WWSC), a version of Operations Challenge held since 2010 that features four events designed for two-member teams. Watching members of the Water Environment Association of Texas Centrifugal Force and Controlled Chaos of the Water Environment Association of South Carolina talk shop in between events at Operations Challenge, they seemed like one unit rather than two of the most competitive crews in Division I.

At this year's WWSC in May, they were.

Centrifugal Force coach Jeremy Thompson and Controlled Chaos member Rory Byrne were two of eight representatives of the Operations Challenge community to compete in Munich. Their competition included two teams sponsored by Empowering Brands (Tuscaloosa, Alabama) — comprising Byrne's Controlled Chaos colleagues Kevin Ganley, Troy Newton, Patrick Ross, and Tyler Waterhouse; Lindie Aragon from the Sewerside Squad; and Sarah Hickman, a former competitor and current judge for the Laboratory and Vaughan Maintenance events.

Thompson and Byrne placed second in WWSC's Repair and Maintenance Event. They recorded the fastest finish time by a wide margin, completing the event in 14 minutes while most other teams took nearly twice as long, Thompson said. However, speed is only one small part of WWSC's judging procedures. Participants mainly receive scores based on precision.

"Coming from the American-style Operations Challenge, we're so used to doing things quick and efficiently," Thompson said. "It's a big change trying to get your mindset about that right because your body is always telling you you're going slow and need to speed up."

Byrne was quick to point out that while he and Thompson may not have left Germany on the winners' podium, they at least outperformed the other members of Controlled Chaos.

"They were lucky enough to watch us," Byrne joked. "We ran all our events a day before they did, so they got to watch us and learn from us."

Both team members said collaborating rather than competing gave them new respect for the other's approach to Operations Challenge. Thompson called their trip to Germany "a life-changing experience."

"I was super excited to be paired up with Rory," Thompson said. "Because of the caliber of our teams, we kind of have the same mindset. I didn't see a lot of differences in how we approach the events."

"I think we held our own, not having done this before and training on short notice without all the equipment," Byrne said. "For having to wing it, I'd say we did pretty well."

Get a closer look at the WWSC 2024 action at bit.ly/WET-IFAT-8-24.



Kasperowicz: Your Guide to the @WorldOfWastewater

Need help studying for an operator licensing exam?

Look no further than the @WorldOfWastewater YouTube channel, where Lucas Kasperowicz of the New York Water Environment Association Genesee Valley Water Recyclers has assembled a growing library of educational videos for wastewater operators over the last 2 years.

Operations Challenge is at the very heart of Kasperowicz's channel, serving as the topic of some of his earliest videos.

"I made some videos going over the competition with my team, and that's kind of where making educational videos stemmed from," Kasperowicz said. "I really enjoy Ops Challenge — it's something that I think is very unique to this industry and special, as well as a great networking opportunity."

Most of Kasperowicz's videos center on a free, 100-question exam he designed to cover common topics and concepts applicable across different certification levels. He periodically releases 10-minute videos that dissect the test five questions at a time.

"I give people the answer and then I do a follow-up of why that's the answer," Kasperowicz said. "I'm trying to broach topics that I don't see as readily available in the other materials that I've seen."

With more than 3,500 subscribers so far, the channel continues to expand its reach.

"I love the comments that I get from people who say, 'This helped me pass my test,'" Kasperowicz said. "That's what makes it all worth it."

Browse Kasperowicz's resources at www.youtube.com/@WorldOfWastewater.



Lucas Kasperowicz of the New York Water Environment Association Genesee Valley Water Recyclers is the creator of the @WorldOfWastewater YouTube channel, which offers wastewater operators a growing collection of free educational videos to help them pass their certification exams. Kieffer Photography

ELITE COMPETITORS TRADE HARD HATS FOR JUDGING JERSEYS



Members of the Chesapeake Water Environment Association Technicians, including Mike Marinelli, Steve Thomas, and Frank Schmidt (far left), as well as Kirk Gonsalves of the Water Environment Association of Ontario Sludgehammers (immediate left), debuted this year as judges for the Safety, Lab, and Collection Systems events. Kieffer Photography

Some of last year's top competitors recently learned that the Operations Challenge experience is vastly different on the other side of the barricade.

Neither the Water Environment Association of Ontario Sludgehammers nor the Chesapeake Water Environment Association Technicians — both of

whom were slated for Division I appearances — were able to compete this year due to scheduling constraints. This did not stop the Sludgehammers' Kirk Gonsalves or the Technicians' Mike Marinelli, Frank Schmidt, Steve Thomas, and Brad Yeakle from serving as first-time event judges in New Orleans.

Going from competitor to judge demanded a

