

SIUE ERTC's Lallish named IAWPCO Operator of the Year

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EDWARDSVILLE - Rick Lallish, program director of Water Pollution Control at the Environmental Resources Training Center (ERTC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, has been named by the Illinois Association of Water Pollution Control Operators (IAWPCO) as its Outstanding Operator of the Year. Lallish received the honor during the IAWPCO's annual conference in mid-April, where he also was named the new IAWPCO President.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's (IEPA) Division of Water Pollution Control, Field Operations Section nominated Lallish. Inspection teams comprised of IAWPCO representatives chose the winner among a field of five nominees.

The award emphasizes the relationship between adequate wastewater treatment and clean receiving waters and is presented as public recognition and encouragement for those individuals who have operated their wastewater treatment facilities in an especially effective manner.

“This award is the most prestigious honor an Illinois Water Pollution Control Operator can achieve, and it is incredibly humbling,” said Lallish. “I am honored to see my name beside those who were recognized before me.”

A Greenville native, Lallish joined SIUE in 2008 and resides in Highland. His one-year term as IAWPCO president will run through April 2019.

“My first accomplishment, immediately upon my presidency, was to level the field for the Plant of the Year awards,” Lallish explained. “I restructured the four levels so smaller towns will no longer have to compete with super-sized plants. This was unanimously passed and will be reflected in the next nominations.”

According to Lallish, another of his many goals as president is to bring younger talent into the profession, as many current operators are nearing retirement.

[About the Environmental Resources Training Center](#)

ERTC is one of the most unique training centers in the nation and has been training water quality professionals since 1977. The instructors use its 30,000-gallon per day training-scale drinking water and wastewater treatment plant to teach students the skills needed to properly operate a plant. An example of the training impact that ERTC has on the water profession can be measured in the statistics from fiscal year 2013, when it trained more than 975 students and awarded more than 25,000 continuing education and contact hours.

To meet the important need for trained operators, ERTC annually provides up to 30 graduates from its Water Quality Control Operations Program. These graduates are skilled operators and most possess their state certifications. The placement rate for graduates ranges from 70-80 percent.

ERTC courses are designed to assist entry level personnel, who are preparing for a career in drinking water and wastewater treatment systems, and persons already

employed in such systems who desire education to upgrade job skills, obtain advanced certification levels and prepare for more responsible positions.

ERTC plays a role in the education of minority and female students, who typically make up 20 percent of the students in the Water Quality Control Operations Program.

Numerous displaced workers have completed the program and productively re-entered the workforce. Several displaced workers, who graduated from ERTC, have returned to visit instructors to thank them for “turning their life around.” ERTC also has a commitment to train the returning military veterans and assist them in re-entering the workforce.