

MISSION-CRITICAL PROFILE

Name: Laura Reese

Organization: San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution

Control Plant



Job Category (Check one below):

Water Treatment	☐ Electronic Maintenance Technician/ Instrument Technician
Water Distribution	Electrician/Electrical Line Worker
	Machinist/Mechanic
Wastewater Distribution	Other

1. Please describe the work you do.

I am a Grade II Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator working in the paired areas of Filtration and Disinfection. Disinfection is also known as Chlorine. In Filtration I backwash the 12 regular filters and the 4 recycled water filters. I make recycled water for the South Bay Water Recycling Program, which supplies recycled water (to be used mainly for irrigation here in the South Bay) which meets or exceeds the California Title 22 regulations set forth by the State. In Chlorine I monitor the analyzers and chemicals used to disinfect the wastewater before it is discharged into the San Francisco Bay. In both areas I monitor the DCU (distributed control unit), which is a complex computer program that runs the pumps, valves and other equipment needed to treat the wastewater in order to maintain compliance with our Plant's NPDES Permit. I collect samples from different places in the process stream and take them to the Lab for analysis. I inspect and monitor all related equipment in both areas i.e., filter pumps, fire pumps, chemical pumps, process water pumps and the pumps at the Transmission Pump Station across the street from the Plant where our recycled water is sent for distribution. I troubleshoot problems encountered in my day to day activities and either fix the problem or write maintenance requests to get the job done. I also accept chemical deliveries of sodium hypochlorite, sodium bisulfite and ammonium hydroxide. There are always housekeeping duties to be done and documentation to be written in the log book and passed on to the operators and senior operators I work with.

2. What combination of education, vocational training, apprenticeship, experience, and/or skill did you obtain in order to be qualified and selected for your job?

I completed Grade I and Grade II Ken Kerri courses through UC Davis and am currently doing Advanced Waste Treatment, which is the equivalent to the Grade III certificate course. I was an operator-in-training in 1999; I became a Grade I operator in 2000 and a Grade II operator in 2002. I was the operator in the Lab for 5 years taking care of the process analysis and regulatory affairs for the plant I worked for. I've been trained in first

aid, CPR, HAZWOPER, confined space entry and rescue and I have been forklift certified. I was also the safety committee chairperson for the plant I worked for from 2000 to 2006, updating and maintaining compliance with the State and CAL OSHA in employee safety and mandated regulations.

3. What do you like best about your job?

I truly enjoy the fact that I am a "Pollution Preventer". I like to say that I am #1 in the #2 business. I love wastewater humor; it's in a category all its own. I feel lucky to be able to work with the caliber of people that I do. Everyone I work with is intelligent, highly skilled and committed to what they are doing. Working in the wastewater industry is not just a job you go to every day; it's a way of life. ..once an operator, always an operator. I don't want to do anything else. I've tried. Everything here in San Jose is done on a large scale and I like working with all the big equipment. What this Plant accomplishes in a 24 hour period is awesome. I love the hours and the personality of the people here. But I think most of all, what I like is the fact that I feel good about myself and what I am doing for the Bay Area.

4. Please tell us about the projects and activities you have enjoyed most in your work in the water/wastewater field, and what made them rewarding.

I always have projects. I like projects. The last Plant I worked at, there was a problem with county jail clothing and bedding blinding the bar screens and jamming the flowminutors. I went to the pump station everyday, 2 times a shift. I collected, documented and made a PowerPoint demonstration to show the County how much the flushing of these jail articles was costing the Plant. The Plant took my research to court and won some compensation for the man hours spent. I updated the contingency plan for the same Plant and enjoyed being in charge of confined space equipment and entries into the pump station on a regular basis. I took it upon myself to keep the Barclay's Code of Regulations up to date. I'm a cleaning fanatic and made the Chlorine area a project. There were weeds along the railroad tracks and in the area surrounding the office and chemical stations. There was a lot of sweeping, hosing and organizing. I like to make a project out of a messespecially one that's been around awhile and nobody wants to tackle. I do it because when I'm done it's like, "Wow. Cool, good job". I like a pat on the back; makes me smile.

5. What qualities and capabilities are needed in order for a person in your area of expertise to be successful in the water/wastewater industry?

INTEGRITY! One must do what they say and do so without anyone else around. This is a self policing industry and honesty is of the utmost importance. A person needs to be consistently accurate with recordkeeping and documentation and be able to admit when a mistake is made. Being punctual is also important. The Lab requires a lot of representative samples that have to be collected at certain times and you need to do it when you're supposed to. You have to eat well, sleep well, and in general, keep yourself in good physical shape. You should be able to lift at least 50 lbs., sit, stand, squat, bend, climb, push, pull and fit yourself into awkward places. You also have to enjoy working outdoors in all types of weather. You have to be safety conscious and not take unnecessary chances, and be a team player. One must be able to follow the chain of command in order to maintain stability in the workforce. Being friendly works too.

6. Do you have any advice for an individual who is considering pursuing a career in your field in the water/wastewater industry?

Go online and look into the wastewater industry and see if it's right for you. If so, go on a plant tour and see what it's like. Get wastewater books and read them and learn the different types of treatment plants there are. Get educated in microbiology, hydraulics, and chemistry. Talk to people who work at a plant. Wastewater for me is a rewarding career and all I can say is that if you want a career in wastewater, apply yourself and get in the door.