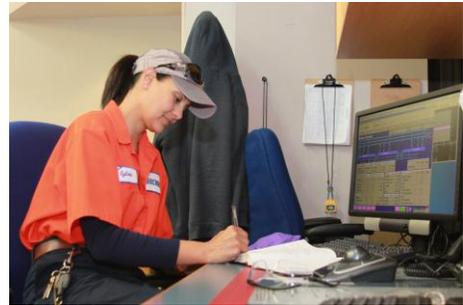


MISSION-CRITICAL PROFILE

Name: Sylvia Ronco

Organization: Alameda County Water District



Job Category (Check one below):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Maintenance Technician/ Instrument Technician |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water Distribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrician/Electrical Line Worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist/Mechanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Distribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

1. Please describe the work you do:

My job as I see it is to contribute to the success of Alameda County Water District in producing water by operating the following production plants: Newark Desalination Facility, Blending Facility and MSJ WTP and delivering water to those we serve while maintaining water quality standards and regulatory compliance. My responsibilities at these facilities include analyzing grab samples, determining proper chemical dosage, chemical inventory, data entry and troubleshooting.

My duties and responsibilities also extended to evaluating the distribution system. This is accomplished by performing a variety of “on-site” chemical analysis and bacteriological sampling. Monitoring the district’s water storage facilities ensures the quality of the water arrives to the consumer uncompromised. This investigative work facilitates taking action immediately should a problem arise.

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?

My career change into operations began in 2005. I was working for a water utility as a water quality lab analyst. When the market was booming in 2005-2006, I found myself outdoors sampling new water mains and interacting with contractors, engineers and other staff. This opened my eyes and I found myself fascinated with the distribution system. The more time I spend outdoors, the more I wanted to become a certified water and distribution operator.

I did my research and came up with a plan. I signed up with the California State University, Sacramento- Office of Water Programs and began my first of many correspondence courses. When I completed the course, I took and passed the Treatment Exam Grade 1. I didn't stop there. I kept going. Soon I was taking classes at Solano Community College and later I became involve with the BACWWE group.

I applied to numerous agencies after passing my Grade 2 in both Water and Distribution. They all thanked me for my interest but they were looking for a journey level operator. Finally, I got my first job interview in 2007! They were looking for a combination Grade 2 Water Treatment and Distribution operator, someone with journey level experience- of which I did not have. My seven years in water treatment as a lab analyst did not count.

So, how do I make myself marketable and stand out in a pool of qualified applicants? It wasn't easy. But my hard work finally paid off. I was able to secure a volunteering job with a local water utility- my own water utility said no. It gave me the experience and skills I needed in order to be qualified and selected for the job and I passed my Grade 3 in Water and Distribution.

It has been a great journey. I have met so many wonderful people in my treatment travels. I will always be grateful for the instructors at Solano Community College for their professional guidance, inspiration, encouragement and dedication. These individuals took time off their busy schedules as professionals in the water and wastewater field, to teach those of us aspiring to follow in their footsteps: Mr. Roger Keener, Mr. Steven Dominguez, Mr. Larry Bahr and Mr. Raj Gumber- thank you so much!

3. What do you like best about your job?

Everything! I love the challenges, problem solving and the responsibilities that come with operating a water treatment plant and the distribution system.

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

Three months after my promotion to journey level operator, I rotated into night shift. This gave me added responsibility handling critical facility alarms, PLC failures, monitoring distribution SCADA, the Newark Desalination Facility and the Mission San Jose treatment plant. During my night shift rotation, I was involved in unscheduled plant startups and shutdowns. This experience proved to be valuable in my development as a treatment operator.

I am very thankful to the entire staff at Alameda County Water District for sharing their knowledge, for their patience and the countless hours spent grooming me into the professional and successful operator I have become. It takes a village...

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?

I cannot stress the importance of paying attention to detail, taking notes and following procedures- without exceptions. Stay within parameters and guidelines. The simplest of tasks, such as taking a chemical delivery- can turn disastrous if you are not paying attention.

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

Absolutely!

Education: I encourage those of you thinking of entering the water or wastewater field, to take microbiology, math and an introduction to Chemistry. These classes will help tremendously.

If you live near a community college offering water and wastewater courses, I recommend enrolling and not just taking one or two courses, but completing the entire certification curriculum and possibly aiming for the two year degree.

There are programs out there like the Bay Area Consortium for Water and Wastewater Education. BACWWE is a group of Bay Area water and wastewater agencies who have joined forces with educators at Solano Community College to provide education for future water and wastewater professionals.

Encouragement: Never give up! It took many applications and letters of rejection before I was finally given the opportunity to learn as an OIT.

Do not lose sight of your goals.

Keep applying to available jobs whose minimum certification requirements you meet. You could very well impress them with your drive, motivation and willingness to learn- not everyone is looking for a journey level operator.

Keep studying your water and/or wastewater material and taking the State Certification Exams. Your hard work will pay off.

The field of water treatment will be a positive life changing experience. Welcome!