

MISSION-CRITICAL PROFILE

Name: _____ Meryl Abramson _____

Organization: ___ City of Hayward, Water Pollution Control Facility _____

Job Category (Check one below):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist/Mechanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Collections | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

1. Please describe the work you do:

I am a Lead Operator in a wastewater treatment plant. This is the journeyman position responsible for keeping the plant running, and overseeing other operators and trainees while on shift. I essentially watch everything to verify that all equipment is running, at its most optimal and efficient level. This work includes making rounds to visually check all equipment, read gauges and meters, and watch the computer, SCADA, which both controls and records the process. Operators make minor repairs, report maintenance concerns as required, collect and test samples, take readings of various processes, make changes to process as needed, give tours to citizens, and more.

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?

It didn't hurt, but was not required, that I have a 4-year Bachelor's degree in Biology and a Master's degree in Business. As technology use increases, many managers are looking for a more professional and educated operations staff.

What was most important was that I had taken courses in Wastewater Tech, and gotten on-the-job training and volunteered at a plant. As quickly as I was able, I took courses both on my own and through the Solano Community College/BACWWE program, and the Regional Occupational Program (ROP) in Wastewater. Then I began taking state certification tests. Passing these tests really distinguish you from others. To date, I am a certified Grade 5 Wastewater Operator, a certified D2 Distribution Operator, and a certified T2 Water Treatment Operator. I passed the T3 test but haven't the experience working in potable water in order to certify.

At work, I asked for *more*...and was assigned safety, and writing the entire plant LOTO program. This has evolved into writing SOPs, designing plant signage, participating in the CWEA Safety Committee. Many people prefer not to ask for special projects, but taking these on—and taking some load off managers and supervisors who are stretched for time—helps to make you a more valuable employee.

3. What do you like best about your job?

I appreciate the variety. Counter-intuitive, maybe, but each shift is different—we work 24x7, 365 days—and each has its own niceties as well as quirks. I love being able to use my biology and science training. Wastewater has an interesting interface of the practical and the theoretical within each part of the process. Also, I previously worked at a vocational training agency that taught skills to people so that they could gain employment. Coming into this field, for me, has been ‘walking the talk’.

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 enjoy giving tours, and sharing my enthusiasm for the field with others both young and old. Our industry has evolved from ‘processing waste’ to ‘recovering resources’ and people in general do not yet understand this. When they visit the plant, they start to understand the enormity and expense of what we do, and how it relates to public health and protecting our environment and the wonderful Bay.

I enjoyed the opportunity to create technical/educational signage for most of the plant. It was a great learning experience for me, helps others in the plant understand what is taking place at a station, and helps tell our story.

On a daily basis, the most enjoyable and possibly significant activity I do is sharing information and training-- helping our new hires build a skill set to make them capable operators.

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?

It’s important to be able to get along with, and be respectful and considerate to others. We work long shifts, and have all been in the industry for varying amounts of time, and come from many different backgrounds.

It’s important to continue to learn, and to ask questions of yourself, and others, and your resources, to try to understand why and how things change within each part of the process.

It’s important to stay abreast of the industry, and learn about best practices. We are a collaborative industry, so it’s helpful to know others from other plants, and share information so as not to make the same mistakes.

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

Go for it, but know that these jobs are valued and not easy to get. Salaries and benefits are excellent. Keep trying to get in, and don’t be discouraged. Network and attend industry trainings and events. Volunteer, both within an industry group, and at a plant. There are programs that can help get you in. Push yourself to study and take state certification tests to show that you’re different and that you really want to do this.