



January 2011 SEWER LEAKS
A Publication of Los Angeles Basin Section of the C W E A

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Featured

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New Orleans Water Official Speaks at the AAEE AIDIS WEF Breakfast By Wendy Wert

On October 4, 2010 the American Academy of Environmental Engineers (AAEE) participated with its summit partners, the Inter-American Association of Environmental and Sanitary Engineering (AIDIS) and the Water Environment Federation (WEF), in the annual joint technical breakfast at WEFTEC in New Orleans. AAEE President Cecil Lue-Hing welcomed attendees with a brief overview of the Academy. A primary objective of the Academy is to certify environmental engineers in their area of expertise, which include, Air Pollution Control, General Environmental Engineering, Hazardous Waste Management, Industrial Hygiene, Radiation Protection, Solid Waste Management, Water Supply/Wastewater Management and most recently Sustainability. Board Certification is the next step beyond Professional Engineering licensure. The Academy also facilitates excellence in the profession by hosting a series of interactive venues centered on significant, complex environmental issues such as this year's AAEE AIDIS WEF technical session, which provides a forum for renown professionals to share experiences and technical solutions associated with Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Joe Cavaretta, AAEE Executive Director, then introduced the featured speaker.



Speaker Joe Becker (lt), Cecil Lue-Hing, Mike Selna, Jeanette Brown (ctr), Joe Cavarretta (rt).

Joe Becker the General Superintendent for the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans was the featured Speaker at the event. Even the progression of Superintendent Becker's career, illustrates the complexity of environmental practice in this region. Joe Becker joined the Sewerage and Water Board in 1987, where he served in a number of roles including: the Network Design Superintendent for seven years, the Pressure System Superintendent, and the Gravity System Superintendent. In May of 2007 Joe Becker, a 20-year employee of the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, became the deputy General Superintendent, a position that had been vacant for three and a half years. His office is responsible for the Drainage, Water Purification, Wastewater Treatment, Engineering, Operations, Networks, Maintenance and Plumbing Departments.

In addition to engineering practice, Superintendent Becker was involved with the Sewerage System Consent Decree negotiations between the Sewerage and Water Board and the Federal Government. He served as the Board's expert in several areas of construction and management and played a key role in the development and implementation of the Board's Preventive maintenance Manual as well as its Emergency Response Manual, both of which are included in the final consent decree agreement.

Superintendent Becker shared his experience during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, which continues to provide unique challenges in managing water and wastewater utility.

The New Orleans Area lies entirely within Orleans Parish, and is bounded by water on all sides. Lake Pontchartrain lies to the north of the project area, The Inner Harbor Navigation Canal is on the west side, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and Mississippi River Gulf Outlet are along the south side, and the Rigolets forms the eastern boundary.

Storm surges from tropical storm events can affect the area on all sides, either through a direct connection to the Gulf of Mexico, or from Lake Pontchartrain. A series of canals and pumps are used to handle the interior drainage and to move excess floodwater back into the exterior canals and Lake Pontchartrain.



Attendees enjoy breakfast (lt) AAE President Cecil Lue-Hing addresses the assembly (rt).

Living in a city bisected by the Mississippi River and abutting Lake Ponchartrain, causes New Orleanians to have a complicated relationship with water. New Orleans is below sea level and protected by 104.8 miles of levees and floodwalls. The city's 3,200-mile system of water and sewer lines were in need of improvements before Hurricane Katrina and suffered additional damage due to the inundation of pipe-corroding salt water. In the 1990s, the EPA ordered what amounted to roughly \$650 million in sewer system improvements. The city was working on that project when Katrina dealt the entire system a setback. The original 2010 deadline is no longer considered achievable.

When Katrina struck on Aug. 29, 2005, 80% of New Orleans was inundated. The surge of water caused water, sewer and drainage lines below the streets to shift, loosening joints and causing countless breaks. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as much as 50 million gallons of water a day were being lost to leaks, this is two and one-half times pre-Katrina levels. In addition, crews also encountered sewage system leaks. Superintendent Becker applauded the tireless efforts of his staff during disaster response. Communications were largely limited to word of mouth and yet crews reported to their duty stations and remained to serve the community in untenable circumstances, placing their commitment to the city above individual needs.

Two years after Katrina, major line breaks have been repaired and the city's population continues to recover, it is currently estimated at 262,000, which is good news, although still below the 455,000 residents that lived in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. City tap

water is now safe to drink, as demonstrated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency verification that New Orleans' drinking supply achieves all federal drinking water standards.

Although engineering and operations ingenuity has led to innovative solutions, there are still challenges. Most notably these are financial, it is estimated that rebuilding and improving the water, sewer and drainage systems will cost \$5.7 billion over the next 25 years. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has set aside about \$150 million so far and expects to commit tens of millions of dollars more. Although this helps the situation, FEMA is not mandated to cover necessary infrastructure upgrades. As an emergency response agency, federal law supports financing only system repairs that are directly correlated to the disaster impacts.

Superintendent Becker said that the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans is attempting to finance the necessary infrastructure rehabilitation through a phased-in increase in water rates that would bring in about \$100 million over four years. Some business owners and residents, burdened since Katrina by higher costs for insurance, electricity and housing, oppose this proposed increase.



Participants discuss issues (lt), Attendees enjoy networking breakfast (rt).

As we saw after hurricane Betsy in 1965, Camille in 1969, and Katrina in 2005, there is a perennial desire to return and restore low lying-communities throughout the Gulf Coast, despite the lack of storm and flood protection and general future risk. Coupled with this condition is the resistance of communities on higher ground to accept higher-density housing and lower income populations. This dilemma could possibly be addressed by creating higher-density development adjacent to levees and floodwalls.

Superintendent Becker concluded with a vision for the future. There has historically been a reciprocating relationship between New Orleanians and the Dutch. In the past Dutch Engineers studied and learned from New Orleans and recently, in April of 2010, this dialogue continued through a series of design charrettes. Visions for the future include providing space for water storage by strategically widening the outfall canals and lowering the water level. Bayou St. John, currently impaired, would again interact with Lake Ponchartrain and provide a constant source of water to charge the system. A water-retention network could reduce demand on the pumping system, replenish and balance groundwater, clean surface runoff, and lower the ambient air temperature. These triple bottom line solutions increase challenge the hurricane devastated community to regard the surrounding water not as the threat that it has historically been but as an opportunity.



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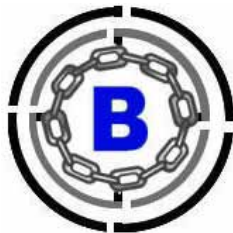
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SPECIAL EVENTS CALENDAR

Jan 8 th	LABS Awards Banquet, Long Beach, http://www.labsocfwea.com/
Jan 18 th	One Day Specialty Workshop; Biosolids; Whittier, http://www.labsocfwea.com/
Jan 20 th	Collections Training Seminar; Huntington Beach, http://www.labsocfwea.com/
Feb 17 th	Disney Concert Hall Tour, Los Angeles; http://www.labsocfwea.com/
Jan 26 th	Reflections of a Green Business Pioneer; UCLA; http://www.ucla.edu

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