



# Wells Sanitary District Newsletter

September 2024



## EPA honors WSD for excellence

The Wells Sanitary District (WSD) was recognized in January by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New England Office for our commitment to improving water quality.



The WSD Crew received an *EPA Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Operation and Maintenance Excellence Award* "for exceptional work in

operating and maintaining the wastewater treatment plant during the past year." The facility was one of only three across New England to receive this award, placing the WSD team among the top in the region.

"Wastewater treatment is a vital, but often overlooked, part of our world. Most of us don't realize what it takes behind the scenes for wastewater to be treated for pollution control and reuse, in order to protect public health and the environment," said EPA New England Regional Administrator David W. Cash.

"It's important for us to highlight those individuals and entities who excel in their work to protect our water quality and our health, and we at EPA congratulate them for their dedication to the environment and to our communities."

In addition to ongoing excellence, the EPA highlighted the response by WSD staff following a fire in the Electrical Room in January 2023.

The EPA Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Operation and Maintenance Excellence Award recognizes and honors the employees of publicly owned wastewater treatment plants for their commitment to improving water quality with outstanding plant operations and maintenance. Especially with the smaller facilities, conscientious operators and staff continue to perform exceptionally with limited resources.

Thanks to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which was instrumental in our facility's nomination.

## ONLINE BILL PAY IS HERE!

It's quick, it's easy, and it's here! Our online bill payment system is live and you're going to love it!

The WSD team replaced our 20-year-old, paper-based billing process with an updated, electronic system that offers:

- E-statements
- Text or email reminders
- Make online payment using credit/debit card, e-check, ACH, or PayPal.

To Set up Online Payments Through InvoiceCloud (844) 243-9152:

- Use 12- digit account number e.g., 000000123400 – where 1234 was the account on the old system
- 3% service fee for online payments from InvoiceCloud passed through to customer
- Checks or walk-in cash payments are still accepted if you do not wish to pay online



## Systems pushed to the max during January storms

The historic storms in January that brought high winds, heavy rain, and historical high tides highlighted the importance of being ready when severe weather hits. Our facilities remained operational despite astronomically high tides and accompanying storm surges.

Pumps at WSD's treatment facility are rated to move 2 million gallons of waste water in a typical day, with a peak rated capacity of 4.3 million gallons. During the January storms,

the pumps responded to the challenge, handled more than 5 million gallons.

"The King Tide was 10.7 feet, with a 4-foot storm surge," says Nick Rico, WSD Superintendent. "I've never seen the sea that high before."

Thanks to our staff for keeping our facilities working smoothly during this challenging weather event.

# Rate increase

The Wells Sanitary District works hard to provide exceptional service while keeping costs down. Due to a combination of factors, including needed upgrades to replace aging equipment, to manage impact of rising flood elevations, and to maintain high-quality services, the Trustees approved a rate adjustment, effective January 1, 2024.

The rate adjustment is necessitated by several factors:

- Unplanned expenses – the electrical room fire of January 2023 and the record flooding from two winter storms

in January 2024 resulted in significant repairs, and highlighted the critical need to upgrade our facilities and systems in several areas.

- Higher maintenance costs due to supply chain issues – we are still experiencing a shortage of supplies and equipment that began with the arrival of the pandemic in 2020. In some cases, the wait for equipment is 1 – 2 years. The result is two-fold: inflation and demand continue to drive up prices for supplies, and we're spending more to maintain aging equipment while we wait.

- Treatment Plant – repairs and upgrades to facilities and equipment, such as to the Pump Stations and treatment facility (see story above), are necessary to ensure reliable service now and in the future.
- Technology and software upgrades to our billing system.

Be assured that we take our fiscal responsibility seriously. The rate adjustment is a necessary step to ensure our ability to manage current customer sewer demands today and in the future.

# Trustees approve loan to upgrade pump stations

In January 2023, the Trustees approved a Resolution to borrow \$1 Million through GBRP directly from the Maine Municipal Bond Bank to upgrade aging pump stations. The Trustees also approved a transfer from the Capital Improvement Plan bringing the total project budget to \$1,170,000. WSD's Crew acted as General Contractor, building, demolishing, and coordinating contractors for specialty work.

WSD's Crew is an award-winning, high-value Team who does a great job building and re-building our system. Through their hard work, they have upgraded pump stations and parts of the plant, saving WSD money. For example, the Engineer's Estimate for



The newly installed pumps at pump station 4.

Pump Station 4 (PS-4) upgrade at Drakes Island was \$889,000. The Crew upgraded PS-4 for \$295,000, saving \$594,000. If you would like more detail about these projects, please contact WSD.

# Recovery from electrical room fire is complete

Work to repair the damage caused by a fire in our Electrical Room last year is done, and the end result is a better, safer facility. "We've completed the Electrical Room Recovery Project," says Nick Rico, WSD superintendent. Nick added that the success of the project is due to the hard work of WSD staff and our strong partnerships with contractors and consultants, including Wright-Pierce Engineering, who created design plans on a fast track.



The rebuilding of the electrical room meant replacing the damaged main breaker and other electrical equipment and installing a new generator (pictured).



# Treatment Facility Upgrade slated for 2024

WSD is in the early planning stages for a wastewater treatment facility upgrade. This upgrade includes:

- Design and construction of the plant's headworks, where debris (such as paper) and grit (like sand) are removed from the wastewater stream.
- Improving our secondary clarifier, which separates waste solids from the water.

Both of these areas are experiencing degradation due to the aggressive environment, and rehabilitation is needed to keep the process running. Design work, with Wright-Pierce Engineers, will take 1-2 years, and construction will begin soon after.

## Our Mission

To provide the highest quality wastewater collection and treatment services at the lowest possible cost to our customers while protecting human health, the environment, Wells beaches and marshes.

## Our Vision

WSD strives to be diligent, customer-focused stewards of the environment, continuously improving in collecting, transporting, and treating wastewater.