BENEFITS

FROM THE NBP EMS DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

The NBP EMS program has been helping its demonstration agencies manage their biosolids practices to address internal efficiencies and issues of public concern in local communities. Wastewater agencies participating in the EMS program are becoming more responsive to concerns about biosolids management practices. Each of the NBP demonstration agencies is leading the way to excellence through environmental management and continuous improvement. Testimonials from two agencies that successfully achieved verification of their EMS programs during 2003 are described below.

ENHANCING BIOSOLIDS INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND EMS PROGRAM PROMOTION

Biosolids information dissemination and EMS promotion efforts will be expanded in 2004 to include:

- **General biosolids information activities, thereby positioning the NBP as the primary national source of credible biosolids products and management information**
- **Promotion of the EMS program within the wastewater profession, with a focus on using the experiences and benefits generated by demonstration agencies as a learning tool to encourage more agencies to participate**
- **Establishing clear "brand recognition" among key interested parties**

In 2004, there will be more NBP outreach to groups outside the wastewater profession. The information provided to these outside sources will focus not only on why the NBP has chosen to implement its EMS program, but more importantly the benefits that its demonstration agencies are experiencing as they develop their EMSs. The features of the NBP EMS program will include robust public participation, complete openness of agency programs, a focus on environmental results, and ongoing communication with the public.

Lessons learned from the first EMS verification graduates in 2003-2004 will serve as the framework for completing and refining the final NBP EMS Blueprint model for the wastewater profession. Expectations are that national and local interested parties ultimately will view the NBP program as a progressive, credible effort clearly demonstrating a biosolids organization's commitment and capacity to deliver consistent regulatory compliance, effective and meaningful communication, and continual environmental improvement.

Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez congratulates Orange County Sanitation District's General Manager, Blake Anderson

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN *NBP Certified Agency?*

In order to be admitted and certified to the National Biosolids Partnership's World Class Biosolids Environmental Management System Program, an organization must meet five requirements.

1. *The agency has documented its responsibility for the Biosolids Value Chain-pretreatment, treatment and final use;*
2. *The agency has committed to the 10 principles in the National Biosolids Partnership's Code of Good Practice;*
3. *The agency operates a Biosolids Environment Management System that meets all the National Biosolids Partnership's requirements;*
4. *The agency has committed to make continual improvements in their Environmental Management System for environmental performance; regulatory compliance; public participation; and quality biosolids management practices; and*
5. *The agency has successfully completed a fully independent audit of its Environmental Management System and has been verified by a National Biosolids Partnership's accredited company.*

The NBP Seal of Approval means that the agency has been certified by the NBP

Orange County Sanitation District's Biosolids Environmental Management System: A Verified Agency's Perspective

In July 2003, Orange County Sanitation District (OCSD), CA became the first agency to have a verified Biosolids Environmental Management System (EMS). Staff were excited by the widespread congratulations including several local, state, and federal elected officials, key interested parties, and many supportive people within our industry. Although achieving the EMS verification was a great accomplishment, OCSD's journey is far from over, as would be expected from a system based on continuous improvement. Below are some of our experiences; where we have been in our EMS adventures and where we are headed in the future.

OTHER EMS BENEFITS

One of the first major changes made as a requirement for the biosolids EMS was the reorganization of documentation. Piles of scattered files soon became a bookshelf of organized binders so everyone knew where to find important documents. This was especially handy when our EPA Region IX inspector paid us a surprise visit! The inspection went swimmingly well as a result of this reorganization.

The next major improvement was to break down some of the historic "silos" that are associated with a typical wastewater treatment plant. Through the "biosolids value chain" or all the

Optimizing Environmental Performance Through the NBP EMS Program

The biosolids EMS program differs from other management systems because it requires agencies to continually improve all aspects of biosolids management and manage for results. Optimizing product quality based on end use/disposal is critical to achieving four key outcomes:

- **environmental performance**
- **regulatory compliance**
- **relations with interested parties**
- **quality biosolids management practices**

These outcomes are important in achieving NBP's public acceptance goal and are what auditors consider during the third-party audit. The program requires utilities to establish environmental performance goals and evaluate them to identify potential weaknesses. They also are expected to be attentive to and successful in their efforts to meet regulatory compliance obligations. In addition, utilities must seek and create meaningful opportunities for public participation in planning, implementing, and auditing the EMS, as well as demonstrate a strong commitment to using quality biosolids management practices. NBP believes that these the four outcome areas help determine if the agencies EMS is really working an producing improved outcomes of a utility's commitment to conform to the EMS program and goals as defined by the *Code of Good Practice*.

The NBP has also laid out suggestions for wastewater agencies on how to develop an effective communications plan in the **National Manual of Good Practice** and **EMS Elements.** During 2004, additional tools will be developed to assist EMS program participants with public education and public participation activities. Additionally, as more agencies successfully achieve certification, organizations will continue to receive more and more recognition for their achievement from the NBP.

THE MISSION OF THE NATIONAL BIOSOLIDS PARTNERSHIP (NBP) IS TO:

- *Advance environmentally sound and accepted biosolids management practices;*
- *Develop a comprehensive environ-mental management system (EMS) for biosolids that will serve as a model for the wastewater profession;*
- *Help EMS program participants involve their communities in defining improved performance or areas that still require attention;*
- *Help EMS program participants demonstrate to their communities that they are committed to performing above and beyond mandatory regulatory requirements and to explain how they are working to improve their environmental performance; and*
- *Develop and administer a centralized clearinghouse for biosolids information*

processes that affect biosolids quality and the Biosolids EMS Steering Committee, OCSD staff and vendors have also been able to work together on the biosolids EMS manual as well as routine daily matters to more effectively resolve issues as they arise. The team is evolving to the point where we are starting to see some valuable brainstorming and input that is resulting in program improvements.

These program improvements are in addition to the several made in response to OCSD's external verification audits in March and June 2003. The external and internal audits have proven very useful to improving OCSD's program. For instance, the external audit identified a need for an improved management review of the biosolids EMS. The finding resulted in the creation of staff quarterly updates from the steering committee and more regular updates with management. This finding helped to re-establish management's involvement in the program.

OCSD's biosolids vendors have also made great strides in their commitment to the biosolids EMS. One vendor has greatly improved his relationship with the local communities in which they do business, including posting a large sign with the company's name, contact information, and mission statement.

OCSD's outcomes related to environmental performance, regulatory compliance, quality biosolids practices, and public communication and participation for fiscal year 2002-03 have been favorable. OCSD metals are consistently 77% below the stringent exceptional quality level. With the exception of one vendor over-application incident, there were no value chain non-compliance events. There were about 450 external stakeholders reached by mail, three major public input opportunities in addition to the numerous public meetings attended by staff to hear the communities input, about 450 unique hits to the OCSD biosolids website, and about 27 internal stakeholder training sessions held. Since listening to our stakeholders' comments in public meetings, OCSD has ramped-up its Class A biosolids production to almost 50% in the past year. In addition, OCSD is about to kickoff the implementation of its long-term plan that moves the agency to Class A biosolids products and their corresponding markets. The strategic plan is located at: http://www.ocsd.com/about/reports/strategic_plans.asp.

As part of OCSD's commitment to continuous improvement, we are currently working to improve our internal performance indicators tracking to better document the benefits of our biosolids EMS. In the meantime, for those interested in bottom-line costs, OCSD staff estimate that it has cost us about $250,000 in internal staff time over three years to get our biosolids EMS up and running. We currently are spending about one and a half full-time staff member's time implementing and maintaining the system and ensuring its continuous improvement.

OCSD still has much growing to do to meet our goal of having a mature EMS, and we will continue to share our experiences with the community and the wastewater profession. OCSD's EMS manual is located at http://www.ocsd.com/info/biosolids/ems.asp.

NO MORE SILOS