



# *NEWS RELEASE*

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## **State's Water Plant Operators Recognize "Top Operators" In the State at Annual Event**

### *2013 Operators of the Year named in Springfield*

**Springfield, Ill.** –The Illinois Potable Water Supply Operators Association and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency recognized nine outstanding professionals in their individual categories of service. These operators produce and supply drinking water for Illinois consumers.

Nearly 800 members and guests of the Illinois Potable Water Operators Association (IPWSOA) honored **Alan Stark**, City of Chicago Department of Water Management, **Christopher Lemke**, Village of Sugar Grove, and **Gary Hallaert**, Village of Algonquin, for their outstanding work in consistently supplying safe drinking water on a daily basis to consumers, and their contributions to the industry.

Operators are rated on the day-to-day operation of facilities that use surface water or groundwater as their water source, or purchase water from another source and distribute it to consumers. "Operator of the Year" is the highest professional honor operators can receive in recognition of service and performance in the waterworks industry. In addition, finalists are designated in each category.

Alan Stark is the Deputy Commissioner of the City of Chicago Department of Water Management. Stark was chosen as Operator of the Year in the Surface Water category. He oversees the operations that treat and deliver 791,909,000 gallons of potable drinking water each day to 5.4 million people, 41% of Illinois' population, through 514,143 service connections located in Chicago and 125 surrounding suburban communities. Treatment of Lake Michigan water consists of two surface water treatment plants, the Jardine Purification Plant and the South Purification Plant. Twelve pumping stations and tunnels, and two off-shore crib intake complexes make up the rest of the Chicago water system, sending water through 4,349 miles of water main. Stark is responsible for directing all treatment and pumping operations, water quality surveillance, emergency response, and consumer complaint investigations. Working closely with three division supervisors, Stark is responsible for technical and administrative operations that affect all personnel, including safety program coordination and plant operation training. He is proactive in water quality research and has provided assistance to USEPA in specific drinking water research.

Christopher Lemke, Water Operator for the Village of Sugar Grove, was chosen as Operator of the Year in the Groundwater Category. He operates 3 ion exchange plants for radium removal, and

maintains nine well houses and six lift stations, as well as 84 miles of water main, and 1100 fire hydrants that supply water through 4125 service connections. Lemke is also responsible for maintaining the SCADA system, and submitting compliance data and samples to Illinois EPA.

Gary Hallaert, Utilities Supervisor for the Village of Algonquin, was selected as Operator of the Year in the Distribution Category. Hallaert is responsible for the distribution of safe drinking water to 10,942 homes and businesses, and the operation and maintenance of 176 miles of water main, pumping and pressure reducing systems, and 2,213 fire hydrants. He works closely with two other supervisors, making the success of the operation a team effort. Hallaert has implemented tracking data systems that make the operation more efficient and cost-effective, allowing many problems to be identified before service interruption occurs.

Runners-up are as follows:

Surface Water – Jason, Weber, City of Salem, and Don Jensen, City of Highland Park

Groundwater – Joel Summerhill, Town of Cortland, and Dan Swanson, City of Batavia

Distribution – Curt Mezo, Murdale Public Water District and Joe Spain, Village of Norridge

There are approximately 4000 certified drinking water operators in the State of Illinois. These nine operators were nominated and selected by other drinking water operators who serve on the Operator of the Year Nomination and Final Selection Committees of IPWSOA.

Winners and finalists are nominated by their peers, screened by a pre-selection committee, and chosen by a second committee that interviews nominees at their facilities during a fly-around of the state. Committee members, all operators, use a numeric system to rate nominees. The results are then tallied, and winners finalized by computer.

These operators were honored during the Association's 82nd annual conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield. Members from all regions of the state met to stay current on new industry regulations, equipment and processes. Winners of the 2013 awards were announced and received their trophies during the three day event.

Speakers and displays at the 2013 conference focused on safe operation, compliance with State and federal regulations, and new operational and analytical techniques and equipment.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the IPWSOA co-sponsor the conference. The Agency oversees operations of approximately 1,800 public water supplies serving Illinois and their compliance with federal and state drinking water regulations.