



News Release

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State taps five drinking water pros as award winners

OLYMPIA — Washington has some of the safest, best-tasting tap water in the world, and that's due in large part to the drinking water professionals who have the training, vigilance and the wherewithal to take extraordinary efforts to keep it that way.

Every year, the first full week of May is a time to celebrate National Drinking Water Week. It's also a time when the state Department of Health honors the round-the-clock hard work and dedication of water system operators and others who keep safe, reliable drinking water flowing from taps throughout Washington.

Operating a water system is a demanding job involving planning, engineering, construction, maintenance, water quality monitoring, budget management, and excellent customer service. This year, the agency is honoring five individuals' efforts, ranging from emergency response to long, stellar careers within the drinking water industry.

"It takes an incredible amount of knowledge, dedication and hard work to keep water systems running well," said Clark Halvorson, director of the agency's Office of Drinking Water. "I couldn't be prouder of the thousands of men and women who work in the drinking water sector in Washington. Narrowing the list of nominees to five wasn't easy."

This year's winners, nominated by their peers and Office of Drinking Water staff are:

Steve Coke, Thurston County – "Ongoing Excellence"

Coke will be recognized for his ongoing efforts to improve the City of Olympia's cross-connection control program, which prevents harmful contaminants from entering the drinking water supply. He targeted the city's most hazardous unprotected connections and has achieved a nearly perfect compliance rate for annual backflow prevention testing. His award will be presented at 7 p.m. May 13 at Olympia City Hall, 601 4th Avenue E., Olympia.

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Albert Darrow, Thurston County -- “Grace under Pressure”

Darrow, who operates the Clearwood Community Association water system near Yelm, will be recognized for his hard work and diligence during a long-running boil-water advisory last fall. He went over every inch of the water system and made improvements to restore safe drinking water to the 2,800 customers he serves. The award presentation will take place at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 14, at the Clearwood Community Association, 21603 N. Clear Lake Blvd. SE.

Bill Evans, Whatcom County – “Lifetime Achievement”

Evans has been chief operator for the City of Bellingham’s Water Filtration Plant for more than 25 years. He has championed maximizing the plant’s operation and has initiated improvements to increase the plant’s performance. The filtration plant is one of only 12 in the nation to receive the 15-year Director’s Award from the Partnership for Safe Water. He’s a leader in professional associations as well. Evans will receive his award at 7 p.m. Monday, May 5, at Bellingham City Hall, 210 Lottie Street.

Dan Katsel, Walla Walla County – “Lifetime Achievement”

Katsel is being recognized for 39 years of service with the City of Waitsburg. He started as a laborer in 1975, and worked up to public works director. He’s been involved in every aspect of the city’s Public Works Department and oversees several unique features of the water system, most of which was designed in the 1930s. Katsel’s award presentation will be at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 29 at Waitsburg City Hall, 147 Main St.

Kirk Lally and Randy Russell, Spokane County – “Grace under Pressure”

Freeman School District Superintendent Randy Russell and water system operator Kirk Lally were chosen for their response to elevated levels of carbon tetrachloride, a chemical found in pesticides and solvents, in the school district’s well. Thanks to their hard work, the district has a new treatment system that ensures safe drinking water for the district’s 900 students and staff. Lally and Russell will be given their award at 6 p.m. Thursday, May 8 at Freeman High School, 14626 S. Jackson Road, Rockford.