

# I Wish I'd Thought of That



by Jim Bower,  
*Wastewater Trainer/Tech.*

Since I've had this incredible opportunity to be visiting wastewater plants across New York State, I've had the opportunity to utter those words quite frequently.

It seems that many of the people who opt for a career in the wastewater treatment field have this inherent ability to make something out of nothing. This characteristic fits nicely into the field of wastewater treatment, as this is one job where creativity, resourcefulness, innovation, and sometimes the ability to scrounge, is of tremendous benefit. With budgets being trimmed to the bone, and yet with the ever present need to address the problems that are unique to these facilities, operators and maintenance people have no choice but to be inventive. These people seem to be able to access this uncanny knack of resolving an issue in some of the most innovative ways and with very limited materials to work with. It's the "do whatever it takes" mentality that inspires most of these projects, which is why these people are consistently able to make something out of nothing. ("Nothing" meaning recycling pieces out of a scrap pile and pirating fittings, etc., whatever you can use without spending money!)

I've recently witnessed the simplicity of a uniquely fashioned wire basket suspended from the end of an influent pipe in order to trap screenings when there was no system for the removal of screenings installed in this small facility. ("Do what you have to do.")

Another plant created a seal water system out of an

inexpensive sump pump, a 55-gallon drum, a few pieces of PVC pipe and a small polyglass tank for a reservoir, at a fraction of the cost of a commercially-built system. Gravity, or head pressure, was sufficient to supply water to keep the seals cool and reduce wear.

But I think one of the neatest and simplest "I wish I'd thought of that" has to be a classical symbiosis of an operator and nature that I heard about recently. An operator told me he had purchased a couple of bags of cracked corn to lure a few Mallards into staying the winter on his final clarifiers in order to keep his clarifiers free of ice. He swears it worked beautifully – simple and certainly economically responsible.

I could fill several pages with descriptions of these ingenious resolutions to the unique problems and everyday "Murphy's Law" situations you operators and maintenance people cope with. I now make sure my camera is ready whenever I visit a facility because of how frequently the subject of making something out of nothing comes up, and inevitably the operator will respond with "You've got to see this."

When my photo album is full and the accompanying journal complete, I think I'll share this information with a couple of my friends in the engineering community. I believe they could benefit immensely. Meanwhile, I will continue to be constantly amazed by the cleverness and resourcefulness of my friends and peers in the wastewater treatment field whenever I find myself saying, "I wish I'd thought of that." 💧