



[Tapping Into Excellence](#)

Water System Employees Take Part in Annual Competition

By Albert Rodriguez

It was non-stop action as the best-of-the-best in LADWP's Water System showcased their skills and talents during the exciting 9th Annual Sylmar WEST Tap Off competition on February 20. The annual competition brought in teams of water utility workers from LADWP's Water Distribution Division district yards and other local water utilities to show off their skill in various water-related events.

Teams squared off in colorfully named, but technically difficult events, such as Pipe Tapping, Hydrant Hysteria, Hot Flare and Meter Madness. This year's Tap-off event also featured a Safety Fair put on by Water Distribution Division Safety with vendors and water utility product exhibitions

The main Pipe Tappers competition entails a three-person crew drilling a hole and installing a valve into pressurized cement-lined, ductile iron pipe using a heavy, hand-cranked tapping machine. Copper service lines are then quickly attached and run to a service meter all in about two minutes all while avoiding leaks as much as possible. The winning LADWP team this year was the "LA Tappers" of Trunk Line Construction featuring Jose Campos, Sr. Water Utility Worker; Mark Winkler, Water Utility Worker; Nick Castruita, Water Utility Supervisor and Coach Joey A. Castruita Jr. Water Utility Supervisor.

"We normally would use modern pneumatic machines, but if those go down out in the field, it's important to maintain these skills," said Tommy Gibbs, Water Utility Supervisor, Central District. "The competition brings us together. It's good training and great for moral."

The Hydrant Hysteria competition entails assembling a fire hydrant that is broken down into separate components and re-assembled as quickly as possible. The winning team was "Western Hydro Kings" from Western District comprised of Luis E. Zamudio, Water Utility Worker - Christopher Torres, Maintenance Construction Helper and Coach Cesar Barragan, Sr. Water Utility Worker.

The Meter Madness competition featured water utility workers putting together a water service meter from a bucket of parts. Winner of this event was Angus L. Hall, Maintenance Construction Helper of Western District.

In the Hot Flare competition, participants must skillfully remove a water meter from a pressurized water service line, cut the pipe, hammer in a new valve, shut it off and then install a new water meter, all while icy-cold water is splashing around. Their movements must be efficient and precise in order to minimize water loss and install a properly functioning meter. The winner of Hot Flare this year was Alan S. Verdi Maintenance Construction Helper and Justice Baldwin Water Utility Worker of West Valley District.



Justice Baldwin flares copper as he strikes an opening into a copper pipe.

“It’s important that our crews stay at the top of their skill set with events like this, especially during leak season,” said Donald Williams, Western District Superintendent. “Colder weather and colder water coming into the distribution system along with older infrastructure can keep our crews really busy during this time of year.”

The LA Tappers went on to take first place at the regional competition in Sacramento on March 27th vaulting them to the AWWA ACE19 national competition in Denver, CO June 10-12. LA Tappers were in the lead for most of qualifying rounds until being bumped out of finals in the last afternoon session by Birmingham, Alabama Water Works “Bama Boys” who went on to take 1st place. Undaunted, LA Tappers hope to return next year for what promises to be another tough, but exciting competition.