



[Water Workers Tap Into Skills and Talents](#)

By Albert Rodriguez

The skills and talents of LADWP's water distribution workers were on display February 27, 2020 during the 10th Annual Sylmar West Tap Off competition, where waterworks employees showcase their abilities in action-packed water utility-related events.

Workers from LADWP Water Distribution Division district yards and other local water utilities came to compete in technically difficult events known as Pipe Tap, Hydrant Hysteria, Hot Flare and Meter Madness. These events push competitors to the limit, testing their abilities, knowledge, endurance and teamwork.

"The Tap Off competition is a time-honored tradition for our crews," said Robert Lopez, LADWP Water Utility Superintendent and newly appointed manager of the Sylmar West Training Facility. "We utilize modern pneumatic machines to tap into pipes in day-to-day operations, but the competition showcases the traditional, manual way of doing this. It's important to maintain these skills in an event like this that builds moral and brings everyone together in a spirit of camaraderie."

The main event, Pipe Tap, requires a three-person crew to manually drill a hole and install 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 in a timed event. Their movements are frenetic and feverish, but carefully choreographed, and if you're too close to the action you just might get a splash of water!

Though they struggled with a broken drill bit, the "L.A. Tappers" LADWP team from Western District, which included Jose Campos, Mark Winkler, Nick Castruita and coach Joe Castruita, placed a close second to the winning team "Surf City Tappers" from Huntington Beach Water.

Other noteworthy wins by LADWP crews included first place for the "Western Hydro Kings" from Western District (Cesar Barragan, Chris Torres and Ramsay Hernandez) in the Hydrant Hysteria event for the second year in a row, and two showings in the Hot Flare competition. Justice Baldwin of East Valley Water Distribution came in at number one for the second straight year, and Alan Verdi of Trunkline Construction took third place.

A total of five LADWP teams competed in this year's Tap Off events representing the East Valley and Western Districts as well as Trunkline Construction. As Tap Off gets bigger every year and gains more notoriety, organizers hope more employees will get involved and attend this exciting event next year. Winners will go on the regional competition in Anaheim (date to be announced).



Western Tappers' Alfredo Sandoval gives it all he has to hold the tap machine as Chris Torres furiously cranks down on the drill bit during LADWP's 10th Annual Tap Off Competition. Photo by Art Mochizuki