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“CAN THE GREASE” PROGRAM WINS 2009 ENVY AWARD

Little Rock Wastewater's "Can the Grease" ongoing campaign designed to reduce clogs and overflows in the city's wastewater collection system was chosen as the 2009 winner of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality's (ADEQ) Environmental Stewardship Award ("ENVY Award") Friday. Agency Director Teresa Marks announced the selection at the regular monthly meeting of the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission at the ADEQ headquarters building in North Little Rock.

"Can the Grease" was started by Little Rock Wastewater in 2002 in response to a number of sewer system overflows caused by pipes clogged with used grease and cooking oil. The campaign encourages residential customers to save leftover cooking oil and grease in containers provided by the wastewater utility, rather than pouring them down the drain. In addition to developing and distributing written materials explaining the need to keep grease and cooking oil out of wastewater pipes, the campaign includes the distribution of "starter kits" consisting of metal cans with heat resistant plastic liners to collect the used oil and grease for disposal with other household garbage in landfills.

Since the program began, tens of thousands of starter kits have been distributed to residential customers, with a particular emphasis on apartment complexes and mobile home parks, where there is a greater population density. In addition to providing the kits directly to customers, Little Rock Wastewater has distributed them at various community events. After a grease-related overflow, utility employees will hang starter kits and information packets on doorknobs of residences in the vicinity of the problem.

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“Can the Grease” not only has been successfully locally, but has prompted inquiries from other municipal wastewater utilities in Arkansas and around the country. Little Rock Wastewater has advised and assisted the other communities in starting similar programs. In 2007, there were 11 sewer overflows in Little Rock attributed to either grease clogs alone, or blockages caused by a combination of grease and roots. During the previous three years, the number of grease or grease/root overflows averaged 20 per year.

The campaign was recognized last year with the National Environmental Achievement Award for Public Information and Education by the National Association of Clean Water Agencies.

“Little Rock Wastewater has not only worked hard to improve the environment in its service area, but by sharing the information and expertise developed with this campaign, it has helped other communities in Arkansas and beyond our borders to enhance their environments as well,” said Marks. “This is an outstanding example of environmental stewardship.”

Informally known as the “ENVY Award,” the Environmental Stewardship Award was established in 2005 by the (ADEQ) to honor a major contribution by an individual or organization involving activities to enhance and protect the environment and natural resources in Arkansas.

Four other finalists for the 2009 ENVY Award also were recognized Friday:

- The City of Fayetteville, McGoodwin, Williams and Yates, Inc., and Environmental Consulting Operations, Inc., for the Woolsey Wet Prairie, a 28-acre wetlands area created near the city’s new wastewater treatment plant to offset the loss of a smaller wetlands area during construction of the plant.

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- Keep Jacksonville Beautiful for the development of its Recycling Education Park at a former hazardous waste site for use to promote and demonstrate recycling and conservation activities.
- The Molex Little Rock Connector facility at Maumelle for a comprehensive environmental management system which incorporates a number of elements into its operations, including waste minimization; recycling of plastics and metals used in its manufacturing process, as well as providing collection points for employees to recycle items generated in their households; and energy conservation.
- The Systex Products Arkansas Company facility at Osceola, which manufactures molded plastic automobile parts, for its waste reduction and recycling program.

“Once again we were faced with a difficult decision picking just one award winner from a list of five excellent finalists,” Marks said. “All of these organizations are to be commended for their efforts to make the Natural State a better place for its citizens.”