

Investing Time to Build Partnerships between Universities and Cities

A story about Eastern Washington University and the City of Cheney

Introduction

Have you ever worked with several organizations where each is pointing at the other as the problem? You probably have—it happens a lot! It's part of the nature of working with regulations and figuring out strategies to protect the environment.

Over the last eight years, it seemed that the Department of Ecology (Ecology), city of Cheney, and Eastern Washington University (EWU) were stuck in this finger-pointing conundrum. However, with hard work and many conversations, these three entities have developed a cooperative agreement. Now they have a state waste discharge permit for EWU that will help protect the city of Cheney's wastewater treatment plant operations and ultimately protect downstream water quality.



EWU Rec Center—a new building with potential discharges.

Problem

In early 2002, the city of Cheney was looking into the possible reasons for wastewater treatment issues at the city of Cheney's wastewater treatment plant. They suspected discharges from EWU were causing upsets in the plant's operation. However, the city of Cheney did not know exactly what discharges were coming from EWU or if EWU would have any new discharges to them in the future. EWU felt that they were being held responsible for something without evidence to support the claim.

What occurred

Over the course of the next few years, Ecology's pretreatment engineer, Scott Mallery, facilitated discussions between these entities and we started to work as a team to find the cause of the problems and develop solutions. In this cooperative manner, we developed a plan, possible outcomes, and strategies to resolve the issues. Part of this plan was to determine the types of wastewater discharges coming from EWU and which ones had the greatest potential to cause pass-through and interference issues.



Rec Center Grease Interceptor to reduce the amount of grease and oils that reach Cheney's treatment wastewater plant.

Milestones and outcomes

In 2002, we identified the main EWU discharges of concern. EWU began sampling discharges in 2002 to characterize the volume of water and pollutants being delivered to the Cheney treatment plant. Since 2006, Ecology, EWU, and the city of Cheney have worked together to develop reasonable discharge limits for pollutants and flows coming from EWU to the Cheney wastewater treatment plant.

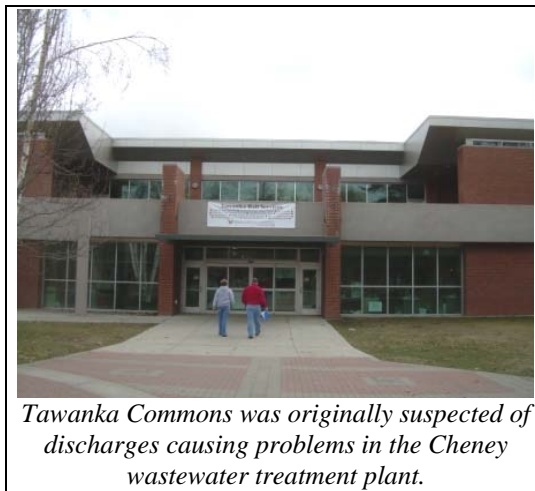


In 2009, the city of Cheney and EWU agreed to and approved an agreement for discharge to the treatment plant. In 2010, Ecology used this agreement to issue EWU a state waste discharge permit for pretreatment of their discharges to the city of Cheney's wastewater treatment plant.

Project highlights

Through this process, the city of Cheney, Ecology, and EWU developed and maintained a very strong working relationship, were willing to communicate, and solved the problem. EWU now monitors its discharges and reports sampling results under a state waste discharge permit issued by Ecology, and the two entities have started discussions regarding future sewer upgrades and building construction at EWU.

In addition, the new pretreatment permit for EWU helps ensure Cheney will continue to meet its Class A biosolids requirements by preventing the accumulation of toxic chemicals in the treatment plant.



Tawanka Commons was originally suspected of discharges causing problems in the Cheney wastewater treatment plant.

Partners

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