

Participants' experiences

Sewerage Utility of the City Yokohama (JP)



Shuhei Okuno
Manager of Sewerage Project Coordination Division, Sewerage Planning Coordination Department Environmental Planning Bureau

In 2013 EBC welcomed a participant from Japan: the Sewerage Utility of the City Yokohama. With a population of 3.7 million the City of Yokohama is the 2nd biggest city in Japan. The Sewerage Utility of the City Yokohama is the second utility from Asia in the predominantly European EBC programme.

We asked Shuhei Okuno how they came in contact with EBC, what the current state of benchmarking in Japan is and what their first impressions are of the EBC programme.

"Last year the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) set up the study committee on benchmarking for wastewater utilities. In this committee, we studied various examples of benchmarking initiatives, of which one was the European Benchmarking Cooperation (EBC). As part of the activities of the study committee, an international seminar on benchmarking for wastewater utilities was held in Tokyo in February. One of the keynote speakers brought us in contact with EBC.

Recently a study of nationwide benchmarking in Japan was initiated. We are currently preparing for a trial benchmark which targets 64 sewerage utilities. The trial project will be finished before the end of March and we plan to expand the target scope to all the sewerage utilities, numbering approximately 1,500 utilities nationwide.

We were really impressed by the diversity of EBC's utility network, which comprises municipal companies, public corporations, private companies and other organizations that are responsible for water and/or sewerage works. The presentations were also very useful. The sewerage utilities in Japan are not accustomed to benchmarking. Hence presentations of the benchmark learning-tension curve and analysis methods for energy management will be very useful for convincing the sewerage utilities in Japan to get started with benchmarking. Through the benchmarking activities, we hope to share the challenges in sewerage management with other participating companies and find out about other insights on issues in the wastewater sector."

Northumbrian Water (UK)



Rachel Kirkup
Investment Evaluation Manager

Northumbrian Water is one of 12 major utilities supplying water and wastewater services in the United Kingdom. In 2013 the company participated in the EBC benchmarking exercise for the first time. We asked Rachel Kirkup about Northumbrian Water, its reasons for joining and how they expect to benefit from the EBC benchmark.

"Northumbrian Water treats and supplies drinking water to over 4.5 million customers across 3 separate geographic regions (300,000 in Suffolk, 1.5 million in Essex, and 2.7 million in Northumbrian) along 25,600km water mains. We also provide wastewater collection and treatment services to over 2.6 million customers through 16,700km of public sewers (or 30,000km including private drains and sewers).

We first came across EBC when our Financial Economic Regulator became aware of other UK water companies participating in EBC. EBC was identified as an ideal alternative when our regulator, OFWAT, recently scaled down its benchmarking activities. Joining EBC was a natural choice for us, as it is fuelled by like-minded individuals, and progressive companies driven by performance improvement aspirations.

We all aspire to be industry leader and use benchmarking to celebrate our achievements, but aspects of benchmarking provide an opportunity for you to tackle your weaknesses head on. Benchmarking forces you have a cold hard look at yourself, and motivates you to investigate and understand what truly drives your performance. Understanding your weaknesses naturally leads you seek out opportunities for improvement and ultimately best practice. Joining EBC this year has allowed us to benefit from broader European performance data outside of the UK water industry, helping us re-evaluate our own performance, and target new areas for improvement.

During the EBC workshop in Madrid, we have been able to discuss performance issues amongst a much wider range of peers (previously limited to companies in the United Kingdom). The conference has given us a platform for sharing and learning with other organizations their experience, innovation and best practice."