

Gabon commissions its first full-scale centralized WWTP

By Michael Albanese and Darrin Hopper

H2Flow has just finished building the first full-scale centralized wastewater treatment plant in West Central Africa. Designed exclusively at the request of the Gabonese government, the plant was designed for a population of 20,000 people in the community of Angondje, a suburb of Libreville, Gabon's bustling capital city.

The plant consists of a sequencing batch reactor in four large glass-fused-to-steel tanks, including screening, digestion and ultraviolet disinfection, all supplied by H2Flow.

Under the present Gabonese government, a large infrastructure renewal program is under way. The country's oil and mining revenues, along with foreign investment, are financing the build. Economically Gabon's indicators look great, with an expected economic growth rate of 7% per year. This is similar to the current rate of expansion in China.

The government of Gabon recognizes the need for effective water and wastewater treatment as clean water and sanitation have a direct impact on a country's economy.

Some of the risk and trepidation of working in another country were eased



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by utilizing resources such as Export Development Canada. They help support and protect companies as they enter new markets internationally.

A strategic effort was made to utilize local Gabonese resources and labour for the erection of the treatment plant, and to train local contractors to OHS

standards and Canadian build methodologies. H2Flow is a multilingual office with a large percentage of the staff fluent in French, which is Gabon's official language. It provided an opportunity for some employees to be immersed in the language and improve their French communication skills.

Any initial apprehension prior to project launch, in regards to work, workers and working conditions, was alleviated almost immediately upon arriving and starting the first phase. H2Flow flew down two of their own liquid storage tank experts for the plant erection.

The local labour was excellent and the Gabonese workers and firms, in general, were really kind, helpful and eager to learn.

This was a great opportunity for H2Flow to train and utilize local Gabonese workers, not only for the building of the tanks, but for the local contractor's workforce to gain first hand knowledge and experience of the wastewater field. This helped everyone in regards to long-term goals of local self-sufficiency for this and other possible future projects.

Access to missing tools or materials was not as easy as replacing them at the local hardware store. Something as simple as an extension ladder could take up to a week to procure. Overall nothing was as difficult as imagined, but being



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extra prepared definitely assisted in the success of this project. All of the equipment and tools, including construction machinery, was sent in 13 shipping containers.

A major item on daily field level assessment was the weather and ensuring that all employees were well hydrated and took proper rest breaks, especial-

ly those who weren't used to the local weather conditions. H2Flow employees adapted more easily than anticipated to the extreme heat or rain, always drinking at least three litres of water a day.

Michael Albanese and Darrin Hopper are with H2Flow. For more information, visit: www.h2flow.com



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