

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts - 2009 Annual Award Program
NEWS RELEASE



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CITY OF RUSHFORD NAMED 2009 COMMUNITY CONSERVATIONIST

St. Paul, Minn.—The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) have awarded the City of Rushford with the 2009 Community Conservationist Award. The Fillmore Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) nominated the city for the award.

The award will be presented at the 73rd annual MASWCD convention, to be held Dec.6-8 at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center, in Duluth, Minnesota. The award provides SWCDs with the opportunity to nominate an individual, business, company, municipality, or organization for concern, cooperation, or implementation of conservation practices in a community environment.

In support of the nomination, Fillmore SWCD Manager, Donna Rasmussen, noted, “Since the floods of August, 2007, while relentlessly working to resolve many difficult flood-related problems, the City of Rushford has become a leading advocate for identifying and sealing private wells within wellhead protection areas.”

When the City of Rushford flooded in August, 2007, their city water supply became contaminated with bacteria, and it took repeated efforts to decontaminate the system. After some investigation on the part of the city, the source of the bacteria problem became clear: sewage water backed up into homes during the flood, and then drained into private wells, seeping down into the shallow aquifer. Because some residents were still using sandpoint wells from that aquifer as their primary water supply, the sewage-contaminated water posed significant health risks.

The City took an active approach to addressing the problem, however, and contacted the Fillmore SWCD. Special flood relief funding was made available by the State Legislature, and the city not only agreed to work with the SWCD to seal the 300 wells that had been found, it also agreed to handle the well sealing funding for the residents, who were already dealing with the loss of their home and possessions. SWCD Board Members met with the Rushford City Council about the well sealing cost-share program and emphasized to the Council the need for enforcing the City’s ordinances to assure that the benefits from the well sealing would not be undone by residents installing new wells after the old ones were sealed. After successfully completing the well sealings, the City is now completing inspections on these wells.

And the city hasn’t stopped there. To help prevent similar occurrences elsewhere, the City of Rushford has hosted well-sealing demonstrations where representatives from other cities in Southeastern Minnesota were able to learn more about the need for finding and sealing old wells that pose a risk to public water supplies. The City of Rushford staff and contractor have also presented information at several regional and statewide meetings attended by hundreds of city water operators and other water professionals.

Fillmore SWCD Manager Donna Rasmussen commented on the success of these efforts by stating, “By sharing the experience and lessons learned with so many other people, they have helped others to take steps to avoid the problems that they encountered.”

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