



Equipment Operators' Safety Training Conference: *Employees mix training with friendly competition*

By Bob Kudelka

Seventy-three employees took part in this year's Equipment Operators' Safety Training Conference in Columbia.

It was the 13th year of the conference, and Committee Chairman **Sam Riddle** said the program continues to grow and gain interest and support each year.

"Our goal is to provide training for the equipment operators, safe operation of the equipment and vehicles as well as improvement of their skills," said Riddle, the agency's Assistant Director of Supply and Equipment.

Employees take the conference seriously. Just ask **Scott Burgess**, of Lexington Maintenance, who won the motorgrader event for the third consecutive year.



A backhoe operator demonstrates backhoe skills by picking up golf balls and placing them into small containers.



Assistant Director of Supply and Equipment **Sam Riddle** welcomes the employees to the competition portion of the training. Riddle gave the employees the rules of the competition and reminded them of the importance of doing their jobs safely.

"The first time I was nervous, but the second time I just calmed down and did it," said Burgess, a ditching foreman and 27-year veteran employee. "I really enjoy it; I enjoy my job."

The May 21 conference was the culmination of county and District competitions. Winners advance to the state competition, and those winners will advance to a Southeast regional competition held in South Carolina this fall.

The events included using backhoes; tractors with mowers; motorgraders; single-axle dump trucks; tandem axle dump trucks; and tractor trucks with lowboy trailers.

"There is a significant amount of team spirit within each District's representatives,"

Riddle said. "We also see a lot of work-related information being shared among the operators, which builds on a system of networking between counties and districts across the state. This allows them to take information back to their respective counties and possibly make improvements in work quality and production."

"Overall, it does increase morale and comradery among employees," Riddle said.

Speakers at the awards presentation included then Secretary of Transportation Janet Oakley, Commission Chairman Jim Rozier, Commissioners John N. Hardee and Mike Wooten and Chief Engineer of Operations **Leland Colvin**.

"Our most precious and most important

asset in the SCDOT is you – our family – we really appreciate everything you do," Oakley said. "It's our job to give you everything we can to make your job safer... Thank you very, very much for your commitment to safety and to each other."

Looking ahead to the regional conference, Oakley said, "We need to beat Tennessee... so bring your A-game with you."

Chairman Rozier praised the work of all maintenance employees at SCDOT.

"We're constantly amazed at how much you guys get done on our roads with so little money," Rozier said. "New Jersey spends \$2 million per mile per year on their roads; most states spend \$500,000. And South Carolina gives you \$39,000 per mile."

"I don't know how you provide the roads that you provide with so little money," Ro-



Judges measure and record how close an operator pulled up to a stop.



ABOVE: District 3 Committee member **Jason Allison** gives his team a few words of encouragement before the competition. It must have worked. District 3's team scored the highest overall.



A competitor maneuvers his single-axle dump truck through a narrow set of tennis balls. Equipment operators demonstrate their knowledge of the vehicle's position without being able to physically see the obstacles.



LEFT and ABOVE: This year, judges used iPads to score the competitors which improved accuracy and quickened scoring.

zier said. "There's no way you can provide better roads than you do."

Colvin thanked Riddle for his work in chairing the committee and once again making sure the conference was a success.

Riddle thanks Oakley and the Commissioners for supporting the training. He also thanked Colvin, **Andy Leaphart**, **Tina Kennedy**, the District Engineering Admin-

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