

Public Health Association media release

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Christchurch waste and water workers “unsung heroes” of quakes: PHA

The men and women of the Christchurch City Council’s Water and Waste Unit and Citycare were honoured tonight at the Public Health Association conference dinner as “unsung heroes” whose extraordinary response to the Canterbury earthquakes helped avert associated health disasters.

In presenting the award, the Medical Officer of Health for Canterbury, Dr Alistair Humphrey, said that before the earthquakes most Christchurch people would not have given any thought to the important role these workers play in protecting their health.

“Water and sewage infrastructure is usually out of sight and out of mind and we take them for granted, as we do those who help keep them working. It’s not a glamorous job but it’s essential to public health.

“Moreover, this work continues well into the recovery phase. More than 11 kilometres of major sewerage lines have been repaired or replaced. A programme is now taking place to gradually remove the chlorine initially added to the water supply to make it safe, and there is much work also happening on the wastewater treatment plant.

“The massive scale of damage to this vital infrastructure in the earthquakes left Christchurch people at risk of major outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness that almost always follow disasters of this magnitude. That this did not happen is a tribute to the skill and dedication of the water and waste workers repairing broken sewers and restoring water supplies so quickly.

“While police, firefighters and other emergency personnel have rightly been recognised for their contribution to the aftermath of each emergency, the invaluable assistance of the council’s Water and Waste Unit and Citycare has not been acknowledged and that is what this award is about.”

The unit’s manager, Mark Christison, said he was delighted to accept the award on behalf of the workers.

“This recognises the contribution made by hundreds of council, contracting and engineering consulting staff who worked long hours after the September, February and June earthquakes to restore the essential water, wastewater and solid waste services to the Christchurch community.

“This includes the significant effort from council laboratory staff who were assisted throughout by Community and Public Health and New Zealand Army sampling staff.

“It was, and still is, a significant team exercise, and I have been very proud of the achievements of the greater team. “

“This award has never before been given at a PHA conference, but the Canterbury organising committee felt moved to recognise and honour the superb work of the unit and Citycare. They did a heroic job in very difficult circumstances, not once but several times,” Dr Humphrey told the delegates.

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Media are invited to attend the whole or any part of the Conference.

To arrange interviews please contact Penny Cooper (Conference media liaison): 0274 547 584.

Links:

- [Conference website](#)
- [Conference handbook and programme](#)
- [Presenter abstracts and information](#)
- [Presenter abstracts only.](#)