

Ernie Wilmink, president and founder of “The Key” Water & Air International, Inc., Lindsay, Neb., is celebrating his 40th year in the water industry this year. He began his business in the Netherlands and moved it to Nebraska in 1990.

“I wanted to specialize in one part of the water treatment world, but also be recognized as the one to talk to when you say ‘We really have a problem,’” Wilmink said.

Ozone at Heart

He decided to specialize in ozone, a technology that he says is “at the heart of every operation. There is always one way or another that ozone is involved.”

Wilmink explained, for example, how ozone technology is successfully implemented in the dairy industry. The dairy industry uses a high amount of chemicals for disinfection, but “we replace that whole chemical line with only cold water with the right amount of oxidation reduction potential,” Wilmink said. “The farmer gets better quality milk and a healthier herd.”

Wilmink also provides ozone treatment for the wine industry. “The Key” services 20 to 24 wineries in Nebraska with equipment. Ozone is used to disinfect barrels, tanks and floors. Wilmink said that when he asks why the wineries choose his ozone equipment, they respond: “Because you increase cleanliness, and it is noticeable in the quality.”

In both of these industries, total cleanliness and bacteriological control are increased, which in turn increases quality.

Giving Back

An operation with ozone at its heart—and one into which Wilmink put his heart—is a project providing the Children of Hope Orphanage in Monrovia, Liberia, with a water disinfection system designed and engineered by Wilmink. The ozone oxidation and complete disinfection system has a clean water output of 15 gal per minute.

At the orphanage, which cares for approximately 1,200 children, a few were dying every day because of the lack of safe drinking water. “I’m 61 now, but I hope I can hang in there for many more years and go back to these kids,” Wilmink said.

Another unique treatment opportunity Wilmink has explored is the development of an emergency water mobile response unit. The self-contained mobile unit can deliver pure water from any contaminated source, and produces 21,000 gal of clean water per day.

Wilmink received a letter from retired U.S. Army General Barry R. McCaffrey regarding the mobile system, and is looking forward to introducing the system to McCaffrey. The possibility of the Army implementing the mobile unit may allow Wilmink to have more funding to use toward

Ozone, education and community service help a Nebraska water dealer succeed

The Key to Success

By Rebecca Wilhelm



Ernie Wilmink, president and founder of “The Key” Water & Air International, Inc.

New Westminster, B.C., Canada, purchased an emergency water mobile response unit in 2007.



other ventures, such the program at the Children of Hope Orphanage.

Education is Key

Education remains Wilmink's main piece of advice for water professionals trying to stay successful in today's market.

"Especially now, in a recession, private treatment is not really the way to go," Wilmink said. "I would advise people to really learn a lot about other technologies. Get more educated about special programs. Ozone is one of the fastest growing technologies, and is also recognized as safe within the food industry."

Wilmink suggests the International Ozone Association (IOA) as a good place to start. "They have people all over the world, and are very educated," Wilmink said. He was invited to speak at an IOA conference in Brussels, Belgium, and has also presented at Water Quality Association events. *wqp*

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