

Perfect relationship with the client

Of the 153 employees at the Water and Sewage Superintendence of Ituiutaba (SAE), 90 are directly involved with the consumer. SAE carries out monthly surveys regarding the customers' satisfaction on sales and maintenance services. These surveys demonstrate satisfaction indexes higher than 90%. In 2001, SAE was the only municipal autonomous service to receive the National Sanitation Quality Award.

In 2002, the population of Ituiutaba in Minas Gerais (MG) went through water rationing. At the time, it was necessary to collect water from the Tijuco River for 10 days. After that episode, there was no need to pump water from the Tijuco River again. Since then, the volume of water supplied from the Sao Lourenco stream stabilised. Currently the stream is sufficient to supply the whole city.

The Water and Sewage Superintendence of Ituiutaba, the autonomous service responsible for the water supply and sewage collection and treatment services in the municipality, has always been concerned with environmental preservation. The programme "Visiting SAE", initiated in 2000, is the result of such a concern. Besides bringing the Autonomous Service and the community closer, it also tried to raise the visitors' awareness of environmental problems using discussions at the beginning of each visit regarding their interaction with the environment. The discussions were adapted to the type of visitors.

The Schools of the Forest was another project of SAE sharing the same objective. The project was developed in collaboration with four rural schools of the municipality, the Municipal Secretary of Education, the Ecological Association Tijuco (ASETI), the Technical Support and Rural Extension Company of the State of Minas Gerais (EMATER) and the State Forest Institute (IEF). The project aims to restore the peoples' perceptions about the need to preserve the forest. The Schools of the Forest programme goes through the following stages: familiarisation courses with students and teachers; collection of seeds during the courses; planting of the collected seeds to create nurseries of native plants and subsequently replant the seedlings around each one of the participating schools; and, studying the forest's culinary offerings, aiming to use this experience for the nutritional improvement of school snacks. Currently, 1,033 seedlings have been planted at participating schools. The aim is for each school to plant around 500 seedlings.

This project is based on the idea that, by introducing new concepts of environmental management and interdisciplinary actions, the times of unregulated use will be followed by a new cycle of sustainable development in the hydrographical basin.

SAE was created as a service with administrative and financial autonomy, managed by the Foundation Special Service of Public Health (FSESP), predecessor of the National Health Foundation (FUNASA) which was founded in 1967. The administration's contract with the municipality determined that the funds for FSESP would be

Ituiutaba, Minas Gerais

Population estimate, 2005: 91,919 / Index of urban water assistance: 100% / Index of urban sewage assistance: 97.2% / Coliforms outside the limit: 1.1% / Total cost of the service per m³ invoiced: R\$ 0.60 / Average tariff charged: R\$ 0.60 per m³ / Index of invoice revenue loss: 23.2% / Productivity Index: 3.1 workers per thousand water and sewer connections / Gross annual operational revenue (direct and indirect): R\$ 7,586,851.72 / Gross annual expenses with the service: R\$ 6,700,095.81 / Annual utilisation expenses: R\$ 6,580,937.77 /

Source: SNIS 2003. IBGE 2000

derived from a fixed percentage on the water and sewage services' revenues, collected by the Autonomous Service of Sanitation during the administration period.

FSESP administered SAE for about 30 years before FUNASA took over. In 1999, the municipality resumed the administration of sanitation services. One of the measures taken by SAE and city hall was to construct a water collection station in the Tijuco River, 5 km from the water collection station of the Sao Lourenco stream. A tube of approximately 5.4 km connects the two stations. The project cost R\$ 1.7 million, which was contributed by SAE, city hall and the state government of Minas Gerais.

In 1998, SAE installed an automated quality monitoring system of raw and treated water that was distributed to the population 24 hours per day. In June 1999, SAE received the certification ISO 9002 for its water treatment process. In 2001, SAE was the only municipal autonomous service to receive the National Sanitation Quality Award, instituted by the Brazilian Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering and recognized throughout the whole of Latin America.

On June 20, 2004, SAE signed contracts with the Federal Savings Bank Caixa, brokered by the Ministry of the Cities, for the investment of R\$ 7 million in the Pro-Sanitation Programme, from the budget of FGTS, on sanitation works. Part of these resources is currently reserved for the construction of three underground armed-concrete reservoirs, with storage capacity of 3 million litres of water, thus increasing the municipality's capacity by 40%.

According to engineer Rubens Kazuchi Yoshimoto, manager of the maintenance system, "pumping water from the Sao Lourenco stream uses electricity. With the construction of the reservoirs, the storage capacity will increase to 3 million litres, improving the conditions for periodic maintenance of the reservoirs".

Fighting losses

As part of the loss reduction strategy, SAE is currently modernising the water distribution system by substituting iron and galvanised steel networks and extensions with PVC tubes.

The preventive work carried out by SAE is seeking to minimize leaks and facilitate the network's maintenance. The substitution process is an essential part of the loss reduction macro-project that will be implemented with the federal government's support, through the Public Call of Interest n° 004/2005: Sanitation Sector Modernization Programme (PMSS), of the National Secretary of Environmental Sanitation of the Ministry of the Cities. This programme offers support to supply systems, aiming for an integrated administration of water losses and the efficient use of electricity. SAE was one of the ten service providers in the country short-listed in the selection process for the Public Call of Interest.

Geophony work is carried out in case of leakages, even hidden ones. When a drop in water pressure is identified at certain points, the leakage is located through geophones, when not visible by other means. When a network leakage is identified, an analysis is carried out to determine if it is due to the tube's material. As soon as it is verified that the leaking tube is metallic, a PVC tube is substituted.

The customers are informed of necessary work in the area. Leakages and problems with hydrometers are registered and forwarded to the maintenance sector. This interaction with the residents allows the identification and repair of damages in the least possible time.

Management

SAE's Quality Programme is part of the concept that public administration should aim for excellence and be directed to the citizen. Of the 153 employees of SAE, 90 are directly involved with the consumer.

The Superintendence determined its own administration indicators based on the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), an instrument developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton, to measure four aspects of business organisation: financial, relation with the customer, internal processes, and innovation and learning.

According to Juliana Reis Ferreira, manager of the Development for Excellency initiative, “these indicators were adapted by SAE for prosperity, ambience, improvement of processes and people, respectively”.

In order to evaluate the administration, SAE uses a total of 100 indicators, of which 16 are related to the strategic objectives, 51 are administrative indicators and 33 sector specific ones. The strategic and administrative indicators are analysed monthly by the administrative council and managers. The sector specific ones are accompanied by the respective sector’s management.

Some of the indicators are: financial sufficiency, which measures the relationship between revenue receipt and total expenses with services; financial performance index, which treats the relationship between invoiced revenue and total expenses with services; indicator regarding the days that revenues are compromised due to unpaid bills; index of revenue losses; index of distribution losses; linear index of gross losses; index of failure to pay off bills; customer satisfaction after the execution of works and services, and; the number of complaints per active water and sewer connections.

Aware that service improvement occurs faster with the population’s participation, SAE created the Department of Integration with the Community in 2003, which evaluates the customers’ manifestations such as complaints, suggestions or tributes. SAE carries out monthly surveys on customer satisfaction after the services, regarding Sales and Maintenance. The annual average of satisfaction is above 90%. The Autonomous Service is also carrying out annual opinion polls targeting a representative part of the municipality’s population. The satisfaction index is also above 90%.

A regional model, SAE is open to visits from civil society entities, neighbourhood associations, schools and sanitation service providers. Recently, SAE received a visit from a delegation of the Total Quality Commission of SAAE-Araguari, Minas Gerais. As Marly Rodrigues Alves, president of the Total Quality Commission of SAAE-Araguari, affirms, “SAE of Ituiutaba is a reference company on sanitation. We arrived at the water treatment plant and we experienced firsthand that it is indeed a high quality company”.

The programme Visit-Action (VisitAção) was created mainly with the goal of bringing the Autonomous Service and the community closer. A site visit includes stops at the headquarters, the water treatment plant and the sewage treatment plant.

The Sanitation Company of Tocantins (SANEATINS) and the Water and Sewage Autonomous Service of Itabirito (SAAE) visited SAE in November 2005. Due to the limited availability of each of the sanitation companies, the visits took place simultaneously, however each one with a different focus.

As Beatriz Noleto de Menezes Fernandes, from the Results Management Division of SANEATINS explains, “we came solely to know SEA. We requested to visit because we thought that just seeing it would benefit us a lot”.

Uilma Olanda Cavalcanti Aguir, from the Development and Market Strategy Division of SANEATINS explains that the SAE’s sales department was the main focus of their visit. “We wanted to look into parameters regarding average tariffs, micro-monitoring volume, trust policies, revenues and treatment of customers with debts. We compared our practices and theirs to see if we are on the right path or if we need to improve”.

Uilma further notes that even the interaction and integration among SAE’s employees makes them want to know more about the Autonomous Service. According to her, the difference is not in the technology but rather in the people. At the end of the visit she stated that “we saw a company where people are committed to their job”.

SAAE of Itabirito pointed out the main reason for their visit, the ISO certification. As Cassio Aparecido de Oliveira, from the sales department of SAAE, explains, “we knew that Ituiutaba has the ISO certification so we came to learn how to achieve the level of quality they have”.

Cassio also points out the difficulty involved to remain at the level required by the ISO certification. “They showed us what is necessary to get the ISO certification, however the biggest challenge is to stay at this level and continue to improve”.

Big part of the collected sewage is treated

The sewage treatment complex in Ituiutaba was named Environmental Recuperation and Preservation Station by the public administration. The plant became operational in 1999 and treats around 70% of the sewage produced in the city. The system is composed of complete-mix aerobic ponds, followed by sedimentation ponds for the containment of biomass.

Treatment is monitored by physico-chemical analyses carried out in the laboratories of the plant. Another sanitary sewage project in Ituiutaba is being planned, aiming to treat 100% of the collected sewage.

Motivating the employees

The participation of the employees is a special characteristic of SAE’s administration. For that, the Autonomous Service instituted administrative actions encouraging the involvement of the employees. CommunicA(c)tion (ComunicAção) meetings with all employees take place monthly.

This space is also used for small training sessions or for information on internal programmes, celebration of good performance from the team, dissemination of information on the Autonomous Service’s performance and presentation of new employees, partners or visitors.

The so-called Integration event was also established for the presentation of new team members or even for employees from various areas that sometimes spend months without visiting other sectors of SAE. The idea is to take groups of employees in predefined periods, to visit and get to know how their partners are working in different sectors of SAE. A concrete result of this practice was the development of the employees’ critical ability, which has led to various improvements. Some sectors serve as an example for others.

The internationally known 5S programme, served as a base for the initiative called “Arrangement Action (ArrumAção), the conquest of wellbeing”. The idea is

Assessment

SAE conducts a monthly review of the Autonomous Service’s expenses, as well as reviewing additional indicators. It was this practice that allowed the creation of an expense spreadsheet, based on the fiscal year 2004 and updated by INPC, by which it was determined that the superintendent could readjust the water tariff and reduce the sewage tariff.

In July of this year, SAE set a 70% minimum on the water tariff, the percentage of the price for the collection and treatment of sewage. Previously, the sewage tariff corresponded to 80% of the tariff for water supply. After two years of fixed prices, SAE increased the tariffs by 25.15% in July. As Solangi Maria do Amaral Lopes, manager of the commercial system of the Autonomous Service affirms, “even with this readjustment, SAE still has one of the lowest tariffs in the country”.

Seeking to rationalise the expenses of this year, SAE released its first public call of interest, an instrument previously available only to the Union, and now extended to states and municipalities by law in July 2002. Municipal Decree 5,653, of July 2005, regulated the use of this instrument for the municipality of Ituiutaba. According to Monica Alves da Costa, supplies manager of SAE, “the public call of interest is a public administration instrument to be used in purchasing goods and hiring services in a more efficient and economical way. It increases competition among bidders and thus contributes to expense reduction and immediate savings in purchasing goods, besides creating less bureaucratic procedures since you need to analyse only the lowest bidder’s documents”.

that the work place should always guarantee the well-being of people, prevent accidents and reduce environmental impacts. Through the Interaction Programme, SAE's workers visit other institutions in order to reflect on the performance of their own organisation.

Wining project

The city hall, together with SAE, implemented the Ituiutaba Recycles Programme in 2000, which involved the construction and operation of a sanitary embankment and community mobilisation for the improvement of the socio-environmental conditions. The Ituiutaba Recycles Programme is composed of six side-projects and is operated today by the Municipal Secretary of Works and Public Services.

In the city, 45 tons of garbage are collected daily. Since April 2005, the selective collection and sanitary deposition services were transferred to the Municipal Secretary of Works and Public Services, which is also responsible for street cleaning and the maintenance of parks and gardens in the urban area. The sanitary embankment will become operational in 2006.

In 2000, SAE a proposal for the construction of a sanitary embankment and submitted it to the National Environmental Fund, where it was evaluated along with projects from 220 other municipalities. The proposal, which integrated the Ituiutaba Recycles Programme was accepted and commemorated for its modern concept, its stimulation for the community's involvement and interaction with the environment.

The project eventually led to the elimination of the garbage separation process at the embankment since the Ituiutaba Recycles Programme is clearly community oriented and directly involved households on the garbage issue. The separation of recyclable materials from organic ones is done at home.

The sanitary embankment of Ituiutaba was projected to receive, in addition to domestic garbage, the rubbish collected from streets, dead animals, construction by-products, waste from trees and gardens and hospital waste. The organic waste and the waste from trees and gardens are transferred for compost production.

Construction by-products are recycled and reused in paving streets, brick production, pavement block manufacturing and plasterwork.

The sanitary embankment's decomposition products are treated in two phases. Initially they are treated in an up-flow anaerobic reactor in the embankment's area. Subsequently, they are forwarded by gravity through tubes, to the Environmental Recuperation and Preservation Station of Ituiutaba (ERPAI), where the final treatment takes place.

Collectors

The municipality integrated into the Ituiutaba Recycles Programme people that lived and still live off of the market of recyclable material collected in the embankment and the streets, in order to provide them alternative revenue sources and opportunities of social reintegration.

With the Sanitary Embankment, the open garbage deposit (lixão) will be closed, and the area will be restored. There is already a cooperative (Copercicla) of garbage collectors in the municipality.

In order to facilitate the process, SAE signed an agreement in 2001, with the NGO Ecological Association Tijuco (ASETI), aiming to improve technical, economic and social cooperation and assist environmental preservation, by commercialising recyclable materials and thus creating revenues for the programme.

The Social Development Department of city hall is responsible for this project that facilitates social inclusion.

With the collaboration of Ana Paola Cancell