



Pipeline Express

To provide high-quality water and exceptional services to the people and communities we support

March 6, 2026

Job applicants take part in job sims



Staff time job applicants doing job simulation testing on Feb. 26. Testing was conducted last week, on Saturday, Feb. 28, and on Monday and Tuesday of this week to provide an opportunity for job applicants for both the water utility worker I positions and the water utility trainee positions to move forward in the hiring process. There were 15 open positions for WUWI and 5 for utility trainee.



Applicants fill sandbags.



Racquel Vaske tries her hand at moving bricks from one pallet to another.

Job simulation stations consisted of filling, moving and emptying sandbags; an overhand sledgehammer exercise; carrying 50-pound buckets with one hand several feet along with hauling a piece of plywood; moving bricks from one pallet to another; and moving cement blocks from the ground to a high pallet. All exercises were timed.

“Happy Hour” in the Lab:

The Science and History Behind Flavor Profile Analysis

by Alexis Rossow

The Water Quality Laboratory at Saint Paul Regional Water Services, SPRWS, quietly works in the background every day, supporting the production and distribution of high-quality drinking water. Our team analyzes hundreds of samples throughout the treatment and distribution system using advanced instrumentation including ICP-MS, discrete analyzers, TOC analyzers, and more, to provide critical data internally, to our customers, and to our regulatory body.

But one of our most powerful tools does not require a power cord.

It is the human nose.

Within the lab, panelists and others in the know sometimes jokingly refer to it as “happy hour,” but the official name is Flavor Profile Analysis, or FPA, a standardized sensory evaluation method published in Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater, the water industry’s primary reference manual. First formally developed in 1957, FPA provides a structured and repeatable way to describe and measure taste and odor in drinking water.

FPA is not a casual sniff test or taste check. It is a controlled evaluation of both taste and odor.



Alexis Rossow, standing, gives feedback to Jodi Wallin, while Todd Freking, left, and Andrew Magdziarz sniff samples of raw water during a recent flavor profile analysis.

Samples are poured in a consistent manner, evaluated at a specific temperature, and presented to panelists as unidentified samples.

Panelists do not know the source or expected outcome, which helps eliminate bias. This blind approach helps the panel focus only on what they are sensing, not what they expect to find.

Trained panelists assess water under standardized conditions and assign both a descriptor, what it smells or tastes like such as earthy, musty, grassy, chlorinous, metallic, or medicinal, and an intensity rating, how strong it is. The goal is not simply to say whether something smells good or bad, but to consistently describe what and how much.

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One of the first Flavor Profile Panels in 1996 taste water samples. From left are Jim Dustin, Mark Cullen, and Justine Roe.

Flavor Profile Analysis Determine Water Taste & Odor

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Flasks of raw water are heated in a warm water bath to better release any odors associated with the water.

SPRWS developed its own Flavor Profile Panel in 1995 to support treatment optimization and distribution investigations.

Panelists come from various areas of the organization and volunteer to participate. Interested staff do not automatically become panelists. There is a vetting process. Potential members complete screening exercises, including scratch and sniff identification tests and sensitivity checks, to confirm they can reliably detect and differentiate common odor compounds. Those who pass receive training on descriptors, reference standards, and intensity scoring so results remain consistent and defensible.

The panel serves as a first line of evaluation in several situations. After elevated storage tanks are painted or rehabilitated, panelists may assess whether residual coating odors are present before tanks return fully to service.

Feedback is often available the same day, much faster than sending samples to an outside laboratory for volatile organic compound analysis.

The human nose can detect certain odor causing compounds, which strongly influence taste perception, at concentrations lower than some sophisticated analytical instruments.

Panelists are also utilized during customer complaint investigations. Historically, prior to the installation of granular activated carbon filters and phosphorus reduction efforts in the watershed led by the Vadnais Lake Watershed Management Organization, our water was sometimes known for a distinctly swampy, fishy or earthy character during certain seasonal lake conditions. Through routine FPA monitoring, the panel was often able to forecast periods when complaints might increase and help guide steps to alleviate issues such as adding powdered activated carbon or potassium permanganate during treatment or flushing targeted areas of the distribution system.

Today, the panel remains an important part of verifying aesthetic water quality as system changes and new treatment techniques are implemented, ensuring that the same focus on producing good tasting, high quality water continues as our system evolves.

As experienced panelists retire or transition to new roles, SPRWS is actively recruiting and training new members. Because evaluations may occasionally be needed on short notice, availability and demonstrated sensory acuity are important considerations during screening.

If you are interested in learning more about the panel or have questions, please reach out to Alexis Rossow or Justine Roe.

Announcements:

Scott Anderson named senior plumbing inspector



Scott Anderson

Scott Anderson was promoted to senior plumbing inspector on Feb. 20, following the departure of Tom Zangs, former senior plumbing inspector.

Congratulations to Scott on his promotion.

Melissa Anderson, benefits specialist, onsite every second Tuesday

Questions about your benefits?

If you want to know more about saving for retirement with deferred comp, retirement benefits, or how to take advantage of the state's new family leave laws, this is the perfect chance to get your questions answered.

Melissa Anderson, HR benefits specialist, is onsite every second Tuesday of the month from 6 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. in the room across from customer service and behind accounting in the administration building.

She will be here on March 10.

Job openings at the water utility

The utility is looking to hire several new positions in various divisions.

In the admin division, we are looking for an Operations Support Manager to backfill Tom Miller's upcoming retirement. The posting closes on March 23rd.

In the business division, we are looking for a couple of positions.

In finance, we are hiring an accountant III. The posting closes on March 9th.

In IS, we are hiring a data & systems analyst and BI developer. That posting closes on March 19th.

In production, we have posted for an internal promotional position of supply systems supervisor I. That posting closes on March 10th.

All jobs are posted on stpaul.gov/jobs and must be applied for online by the end of the day on the closing date.

The promotional posting is listed under internal openings, not in the main section.