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Cal Poly's Society of Environmental Engineers took the silver for their solution in the "Water Treatment from Your Kitchen...and Beyond" competition sponsored by the American Society of Civil Engineers, held recently at the University of Pacific in Stockton.

In addition to the competition victory, the group was also recently named Best Student Chapter for mid-size universities by the Air and Waste Management Association for the sixth straight year.

Cal Poly team members - all environmental and civil engineering majors - included Thomas Abia from Danville, Peter Chu from Burbank, Dan Fitzpatrick from Incline Village, NV, Dan Frost from Vallejo, Stephen Huang from San Gabriel, John Jacobs from San Luis Obispo, Brian McNamara from Fullerton, and Lisa Rotty from Long Beach. The Cal Poly Society of Environmental Engineers advisor is Professor Nirupam Pal.

The water treatment contest scenario was set in a hypothetical South American village that had no access to chemical treatment components commonly available in developed countries. The wastewater was posed as effluent from a nearby river that has been contaminated by industrial and agricultural runoff.

The competing student teams were required to design and build an actual water treatment unit able to convey the wastewater 20 feet to a treatment area without using electricity or fuel-powered equipment. The key purpose of the competition was to exercise sustainable design while producing safe drinking water.

The students' portable Cal Poly treatment unit relied on salvage materials from a junkyard and no chemicals. Cal Poly achieved the cleanest water in the contest by first removing solids with an organic coagulant, and then using sand and gravel filtration to remove the dissolved solids. The final stage of treatment included using activated carbon filtration for water polishing and color removal and stream flow for aeration.

Other schools participating in the competition included UC Davis, UC Berkeley, Sacramento State, University of the Pacific, Colorado State, and the University of Nevada at Reno, the first place winner.

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