

Catherine Kirkland, Environmental Engineer at Orenco Systems, Shares Her Story on International Women’s Day



“Love what you do, and you’ll never work a day in your life.”

Catherine Kirkland, regional sales engineer at Orenco Systems, loves to help people solve water and wastewater management problems.

A recent project took her to Ohio, where she met with property owners who described an issue plaguing the area. Heavy rain events were causing flooding, tank spillage, and overflow of untreated sewage. “The neighbors had wastewater overflowing into their yard,” Catherine explains.

She went right to work helping find the best solution. Problem solving like this is one of her favorite things about working for Orenco. “That [project] was one of the moments for me where I thought, OK, this is why we do what we do.”

Protecting the world’s water is another reason Catherine loves her chosen career. “I really feel like I’m making a positive impact on the environment,” she says. “I took a hydrology class in college and fell in love with the movement of water. It’s such an important resource and needs to be preserved.”

Catherine credits her father, also an engineer, with encouraging her to investigate the field. When she first enrolled in college, she planned to become a chemical engineer but later realized she was more interested in environmental engineering.

“I’ve always loved being out in nature, and outdoors is what I consider my safe space,” says Catherine. “Whenever I’m feeling upset or just having a bad day, I go on a walk or just get outside for a little bit, and I instantly feel better.”

Catherine graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in environmental engineering and a minor in environmental and sustainability studies. She joined Orenco Systems in 2023 and says her coworkers feel like family. In five years, she sees herself still in this same job that she loves and working to help as many people as possible.

She’s found that one of the challenging aspects of her work is running into people who think they know all there is to know about wastewater, even though they’re not familiar with Orenco’s products and solutions. Changing mindsets can be tricky, and according to Catherine, “You have to be patient, strategic, and sometimes even a bit stubborn to break those preconceptions.”

For younger generations trying to plan their careers, Catherine has this advice, “You don’t have to have it all figured out. It’s okay to be unsure, to change your mind, to make mistakes. Life isn’t a straight path, and you’re not behind – you’re exactly where you need to be.”

To learn more about Orenco Systems and Catherine’s work there, visit Orenco.com.