

Certification Programs for Water and Wastewater System Operators: Executive Summary



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Joint report of Oregon Health Authority, Drinking Water Services
and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Wastewater Program

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Executive Summary

Oregon law requires owners of drinking water and wastewater systems (public and private) to have their systems under the responsible control and direction of certified operators. Trained and certified operators are necessary to ensure that the systems are managed in a manner that fully protects public health and the environment. Certified operators also improve facility operation and ensure compliance, protect the public's investment in the facilities, and instill public confidence in the safety and certainty of services. The Oregon Health Authority, Center for Health Protection, Drinking Water Services (OHA-DWS) administers the certification program for drinking water system operators, and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) administers the program for domestic wastewater system operators.

OHA-DWS and DEQ coordinate activities to benefit their respective certification programs. Coordination efforts include, but are not limited to, representation and input at advisory committee meetings on program activities, effectiveness and rulemaking, and general program administration in areas such as testing, efficiencies and the sharing of operator work experience records. Another important area of coordination includes input to trainers and educators through the Oregon Environmental Services Advisory Council for workforce training and continuing education. Program staff also works with the Associated Boards of Certification, a national accreditation organization, on issues germane to certification program operation. Both programs contract with Associated Boards of Certification (ABC) for computer-based testing.

This report includes an overview of program activities and accomplishments, as required by ORS 448.409. Several initiatives have occurred to improve program efficiency, including the use of standardized tests and increased use of electronic communication and database systems. Program highlights for 2011 and 2012 are noted below.

DEQ is working with an outside contractor to replace its licensing software system and integrate new online functionality for the licensing process. Once complete, the software will have enhanced online application and renewal functionalities which will improve program efficiency and application access for operators. Certification exams are currently available year-round through computer-based testing and as a paper-and-pencil exam offered once a year. Over the past two years DEQ has been phasing out the paper-and-pencil exam and shifting entirely to computer-based testing. Starting in May 2013, exams will be proctored with computer-based testing only. Computer-based testing will allow quick turnaround for testing and certification and will reduce the program administration workload.

DEQ is working on amending regulations pertaining to certification of wastewater system operators (Oregon Administrative Rule 340-049). The proposed rule increases fees to cover program costs through 2019 and revises rule language to reflect current program practices and add flexibility. DEQ presented the proposed rules on Dec. 6, 2012 to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission and the commission approved the rules unanimously. As part of the rulemaking process, fees need to be approved by the Oregon Department of Administrative Services before becoming effective. DEQ is waiting to hear from DAS and upon its approval, the fee and rule will become effective on March 1, 2013.

Information on OHA-DWS and DEQ Operator Certification Programs for 2011 and 2012 is summarized in Table 1.

The full report is also available online at:

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/pubs/legislativepubs/2013/OpCertReport2013.pdf>.