

# California Office of Operator Certification

## Drinking Water Treatment and Distribution Certification Program

Alice Webber  
David Maurer, Bonnie Sutherland  
& Michael Rohner

# California Drinking Water Operator Certification

Program started in 1971 with 13,000 certified water treatment operators at five grade levels.

In 1998, the US EPA released Guidelines for the Certification and Recertification of Operators of Community and Nontransient Noncommunity Public Water Systems. Based on these guidelines, state regulations governing the certification of potable water treatment operators were revised to include distribution operators at five grade levels, effective January 2001.

H&S Code Sections: 106875 – 106910

CCR Sections: 63750 - 63850

# Operator Certification Program

- ▶ There are 34,495 certified water treatment and distribution operators in California  
20,410–Distribution & 14,085–Treatment
- ▶ Approximately 1 / 3 of operators hold both water treatment and distribution certificates
- ▶ Each year
  - 8,000 operators apply for exams
  - 4,700 operators apply for certification
  - 10,000 certificates are renewed

# Who Needs to Be Certified?

- ▶ All treatment plant operators who physically treat drinking water must be certified
- ▶ Distribution operators who make decisions affecting the quality or quantity of drinking water must be certified

# Drinking Water Operator Certification

- ▶ Five levels of drinking water treatment certification, T1 – T5
- ▶ Five levels of drinking water distribution certification, D1 – D5
- ▶ Certificates are valid for three years
  - Renewal requires continuing education hours

# Water System Certification Requirements

- ▶ Water suppliers must designate a CHIEF OPERATOR for each treatment plant or distribution system
- ▶ The CHIEF operator must be certified at the same level as the system or higher.
- ▶ SHIFT operator usually one level lower

# Exams

- ▶ Each type of exam is offered twice a year in 10–12 locations across the state on the same day
- ▶ Application deadline is 10 weeks before the exam
- ▶ Water Distribution exams – March and September
- ▶ Water Treatment exams – May and November
- ▶ Up to 2,500 examinees per Distribution exam
- ▶ Up to 1,500 examinees per Treatment exam
- ▶ All exams consist of 85 multiple choice and 15 math questions except T5 which is an oral exam

# DW Certification Process

## 2-Step Process

### Step 1 – Taking and Passing the Exam

- ▶ Examination
    - Education requirements
  - ▶ D1 /T1
    - High School Diploma/GED
  - ▶ D2/T2
    - High School Diploma/GED
    - One basic specialized training course
- T – Fundamentals of Drinking Water Treatment  
D – Water Supply Principles



- ▶ D3\*/T3
  - High School Diploma/GED
  - Two specialized training courses (1 basic)
  - \* Valid D2 certificate
  
- ▶ D4/T4
  - Valid D3 certificate for Distribution exam
  - Valid T3 certificate for Treatment exam
  - Three specialized training courses (2 basic)
  
- ▶ D5/T5
  - Valid D4 certificate for Distribution exam
  - Valid T4 certificate for Treatment exam
  - Four specialized training courses (2 basic)

# Specialized Training

- ▶ Must be at least 3 units or 36 hours long  
(cannot add up short courses to get 36 hours)
- ▶ Offered by an accredited academic institution  
or IACET provider
- ▶ Meet the subject matter criteria
  - Basic class is broad in scope
  - Supplemental Class is specific (i.e. cross  
connection, backflow, water math,  
wastewater, hydraulics, etc.)
- ▶ Must be complete by the exam deadline

# Exam Application Process

- ▶ Review application for completeness, (applications returned for no signature, wrong fee, no SSN)
- ▶ Check application against exam requirements, (H.S Diploma, specialized training courses, certification)
- ▶ Approve or send deficiency letter

# Deficiency Letter

- ▶ Outlines the exam requirements
- ▶ Explains why the applicant did not qualify and what additional information is required
- ▶ Gives applicant two weeks to send in information
- ▶ If applicant does not qualify the exam fee is good for one year

# DW Certification Process

## Step 2 – Applying for Certification

### Experience requirements

- ▶ Successful completion of the exam within last three years
  - Grade 1 & 2 do not require experience – submit certification fee
  - Grade 3 – 2 years experience\* (1 of those years working as a Grade 2 operator in a Grade 2 or higher facility + 1 additional year)

- Grade 4 – 4 years experience\* (1 of those years working as a Grade 3 operator in a Grade 3 or higher facility + 3 additional years)
- Grade 5 – 5 years experience\* (2 of those years working as a Grade 4 operator in a Grade 4 or higher facility + 3 additional years)

\* Treatment Experience must be certified experience

Experience Substitutions – A relevant degree earned at an accredited academic institution may be substituted for all or part of the additional years

# Certification Submittal

Documents that must be submitted with the application and fee

- ▶ Letter from your supervisor verifying experience\*
- ▶ Copy of utility organization chart with names and position titles
- ▶ Copy of utility's official job description
- ▶ Copy of letter or permit classifying your utility

# Certification Submittal

\*Letter from your Supervisor

- ▶ On water system letterhead
- ▶ Dated
- ▶ Timeframe of Employment (mo/yr to mo/yr)
- ▶ Duties performed (Treatment, Dist., & WW)
- ▶ Number of hours duties performed
- ▶ Classification of facility
- ▶ Designation as shift/chief operator (if applicable)
- ▶ Signed by Supervisor with contact information



# Fees

	Exam	Re-Exam	Certification or Renewal	Certification or Renewal for Operators holding both T & D certificates
D1 or T1	\$50	\$30	\$70	\$55
D2 or T2	\$65	\$45	\$80	\$60
D3 or T3	\$100	\$70	\$120	\$90
D4 or T4	\$130	\$95	\$140	\$105
D4 or T5	\$155	\$120	\$140	\$105

# Renewals

- ▶ Renewals are approved based on the continuing education contact hours required
  - Grade 1 – 12 hours
  - Grade 2 – 16 hours
  - Grade 3 – 24 hours
  - Grade 4 and Grade 5 – 36 hours
- Hours must be water related
- Completed within the last three years
- Maximum number of safety hours – 25% of total
- Wastewater classes are not acceptable for Drinking Water renewals

# Certification Renewal Process

- ▶ Renewal notice is sent approximately 10 weeks before the due date
- ▶ The Due Date is 4 months prior to the Expiration Date
- ▶ If received after the due date a \$50 late fee is added to the renewal fee
- ▶ If received within 45 days of the expiration date the late fee becomes \$100

# Continuing Education Course Requirements

- ▶ Must be at least one hour long
- ▶ Must be specific to drinking water treatment or distribution
- ▶ Must be verifiable by the CE provider
- ▶ Operator must supply certificates of completion or ...
  - Name of class, (subject matter)
  - Name and contact # of CE provider
  - Date when course was taken
  - Number of contact hours

# What Do We Look for?

- ▶ Is the subject specific to DW treatment or Distribution?
- ▶ Was the course taken within the renewal period? (previous due date to current due date)
- ▶ Are safety topics 25% of hours or less?
- ▶ Can we verify the CE hours with the information given?

# Helpful Tips

- ▶ Renew as soon as your renewal period starts
- ▶ Include certificates of completion
- ▶ Count your safety hours
- ▶ Check your CE contact information
- ▶ Check our website for your renewal date
- ▶ Be sure to send us “change of address” information!

# Website Information

- ▶ Exam applications, dates, deadlines, requirements
- ▶ List of specialized training courses for exam
- ▶ Expected Range of Knowledge
- ▶ List of continuing education providers for renewals
- ▶ Regulations
- ▶ List of currently certified operators
- ▶ Email subscription signup link

Office of Operator Certification  
State Water Resources Control Board  
Attn: Drinking Water OCP  
P.O. Box 944212  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2120

Telephone: (916) 449-5611  
Fax: (916) 449-5654

Email: [DWOpcertProgram@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:DWOpcertProgram@waterboards.ca.gov)

# Questions??