

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)-
Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee (DWOCPC)**
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes October 16, 2019

Present: Advisory Committee Members: Catrie Levenson, Larry Lyford, Dan DeMoss. By phone: Tai Tseng

State Waterboard Staff: Mark Bartson, Annette Caraway, Jim Fischer, Jaime Marotte, Michael Rohner, Jon Strutzel, Bonnie Sutherland, Alice Webber, Wes Wilkinson, Julie Osborn, Jon Strutzel, Janice Chang, Darrell Jennings II. Jean Choi, Shirley Rosilela (by phone)

Public: Chris Almind, Richard Vierra, Greg Williams, Steve Garner

Introductions:

- Annette Caraway, Manager II acted as moderator for this meeting. Attendees were welcomed. Introductions were made.

Agenda Review:

- The agenda was reviewed, the Special Investigation Unit update was moved down in order, no other changes or additions were forwarded.

Public Comments:

No public comments were presented.

USEPA Update:

- Kevin Ryan (USEPA) was unable to attend by phone.

Program/Exam Update:

Alice Webber, Manager Drinking Water Operator Certification Program

- Janice Chang is the new Distribution Exam Analyst. She comes from the Wastewater Operator Certification Unit.
- DWOCPC processed over 3,000 distribution operator applications for the exam held on 9/14/19. The pass rate was 62% and approximately 18% of examinees did not show for the exam.
- DWOCPC has processed over 2,000 treatment operator applications and approved 1800 operators for the exam scheduled on 11/2/19.

- DWOCPC will not be implementing combined exams and instead is investigating computer based testing for operator exams. Computer based testing will allow operators to take exams virtually any time of year.

Question: Will DWOCPC be addressing changing exam frequency?

Answer: Annette stated issue was brought up during previous meeting and comments leaned towards support of computer-based testing over changing test frequency. The priorities at Water Boards have shifted towards researching computer-based testing.

Comment from Jon Strutzel: November Grade 5 Treatment Exam expanded to San Diego. Usually Grade 5 exams are held 2 days in Northern CA (Sacramento) and 2 days in Southern CA (Lakewood). If there are a significant number of examinees in the San Diego area a day will be added in that area.

Question: Can we get pass data by location? Share data with local colleges to show how well they're doing in preparing examinees?

Answer: Alice, yes will send the information.

- Alice noted that DWOCPC has started to review qualifying course data used for D2 exam. Results of the review will be available in the future.

Alice noted that distribution exam results will be released on Friday, 10/18/19. Treatment exam notices were mailed out on 10/15/19.

Water Distribution Exam Validation: Jon Strutzel, Subject Matter Expert

- DWOCPC Distribution exams were last validated approximately 8 years ago. DWOCPC Treatment exams were validated within the last 3 years after a 9 year gap. Jon Strutzel consults with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), from the water industry to validate what distribution operators at each level of certification are doing and what they need to know to do their job. SMEs review each exam question for relativity to operator job functions. Based on their findings topics are added or removed from survey questions that will be presented to operators. The survey is emailed to operators and based on their answers exam questions are ranked and questions are changed on the exams based on ranking. Jon needs between 5 to 8 volunteers and asked the group to solicit SMEs to participate in this process. Committee members Larry Lyford, Greg Williams, and Tai Tseng volunteered to assist. Upon completion the survey will be sent to operators via a Lyris List blast.

Question: Do we have a timeframe?

Answer: No, it is a complex process and fixing a date for completion is not feasible.

Enforcement Update: Bryan Elder, Chief, Special Investigation Unit

- Bryan Elder and staff members Jim Fischer and Jaime Johnson were present. Jaime is new to the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) and has a great deal of Wastewater/Collection experience. Jaime is currently rehabilitating the case database for SIU.

- SIU has approximately 90 enforcement cases open, 30% or 27 cases are Drinking Water related. The number of cases reported and active is increasing in Drinking Water possibly due to the awareness of enforcement actions that have taken place in the last 12 – 24 months.
- In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2018/2019 DWOCP generated 12 cases and enforcement closed 13 cases. For SIU this was the first time they closed more cases than were opened. Approximately 75% of investigation were closed without any action being taken. SIU cannot take action on some cases because the complainant refuses to cooperate, and/or the case was reported anonymously for fear of retribution and evidence is lacking and some cases are frivolous, or retribution related.
- Actions taken include 1 Laboratory fraud and resulted in 1 suspension and 1 was reprimand as well as a misconduct reprimand in Southern California where SIU worked with the Division of Drinking Water and recommended ethics training.
- SIU cases typically fall into 1 of 3 categories (Operator misconduct, Fraud in lab reporting, Fraud in experience of duties or time claimed). Fraud in experience is difficult to track due to the lack of consistency across the state as to what operators are required to do at each system. If a Chief Plant Operator (CPO) verifies experience time and duties enforcement defers to the CPO's sworn statements and unless additional evidence of wrongdoing is found the investigation is closed.
- Enforcement is working on framework on how they come up with a decision to investigate. What is the threat? Public health? Has the facility issued disciplinary action? Was it a malicious act vs. incompetence? Was it intentional or gross incompetence? Was it a lack of understanding or knowledge? How did the system respond to violation or issue? A lot of plants do not have standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place.
- SIU is now working on a backlog of Wastewater cases. Posting completed cases to the website is an issue due to ADA compliance. They are struggling to be compliant and conferring with legal as to what information is allowable.

Question: How do violations affect certifications? Is the operator downgraded to a lesser certification level?

Answer: It depends on the evidence. It has happened that certifications were revoked, or certification level was downgraded. Letter of reprimand is public information. Previously the letter went to the operator. Now it also goes to the water system, so they are aware.

Recycled/Advanced Water Treatment Presented by Steve Garner

- The CA/NV AWWA & CWEA Advanced Water Treatment (AWT) Grade 3 exam has been finalized and is currently being offered; however, it is too early to discuss passing rates.
- AWT3 exam requires a State Water Board T3 or WW3 certificate, no experience.
- AWT4 requires an AWT3 certificate and 2 years' experience on one or more AWT processes.

- AWT5 requires an AWT4 cert and 3 years' experience in one or more AWT processes of which 1 year must be in at least two AWT processes.
- AWT processes are Membrane Filtration, Membrane Desalination, Biological Filtration, Membrane Bioreactor, Iron and Manganese Removal, Adsorption/Exchange, Advanced Oxidation, Disinfection and finished water chemical stabilization.
- Previous work experience gained before the AWT certificate program started will be eligible.
- First AWT4 exam should be offered in the Winter of 2019. The First AWT5 exam should be offered in the Spring of 2020. There is a 90 day cool off period before candidates may re-test or take the next grade level for AWT certification.
- Still working on AWT Operator handbook and list of study material for operators.
- Exams will be delivered by computer, the same as current AWWA exams. The exams will have a proctor and will also be video recorded, scratch paper and computer calculator provided.
- In order for an operator to renew an AWT certificate, a minimum of 25% of the Continuing Education Units must be in Advanced Water Treatment processes courses and a maximum of 25% in safety courses.

**Regulatory updates for Division of Drinking Water:
Presented by Mark Bartson, Chief, Technical Operations Section.**

With local power providers shutting down their systems due to high winds Mark provided information regarding Public Safety Power Shutoffs.

- Mark updated the committee on Maximum Contaminants Level changes for 11 contaminants. The changes continue to evolve and there is no scheduled date for release of the changes.
- Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) draft regulations have been posted for public comment.
- A revised lowering of bioluminescent ratio (BLR) will be presented to the Board in 2020.
- Micro-plastics testing is being developed and is expected to be released in 12 – 18 months.
- On-site treatment/reuse regulations are currently being developed, expected release is 2022 with adoption expected within 1 year. Local jurisdictions will run the programs with State oversight. Electronic-reporting will not be required and there are no proposed MCLs.

Drinking Water Operator Certification Program – Potential Regulatory Changes:
Alice Webber, Manager DWOCP

- AB 1588 has been signed by the Governor and will affect the DWOCP. The bill adds a new member with military experience to the Drinking Water Advisory Committee and accepts military experience for reciprocity.
- The regulation changes DWOCP is proposing will require a special all-day Advisory Committee meeting. This meeting will not address Direct Potable Reuse. (DPR). DPR regulations will be a Division Drinking Water/DWOCP collaboration.

Schedule Next Advisory Committee Meeting:

The Committee chose April 29, 2020 for their next meeting. The meeting time is 10:00AM – 12:00pm at State Water Board Headquarters, 1001 I Street, Sacramento, California.