

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater & Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Joint Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – June 27, 2023**

Meeting Date: Tuesday, June 27, 2023

Attendees: Advisory Committee Members

Steve Krai, Ben Carver, Josh Vieira, Louis Sun, Monte Hamamoto, Ramzi Mahmood, Steven Garner, Jose Martinez, Greg Williams, John Brady, Chris Castaing, Mike Maestas

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Christine Gordon, Keisha Kelley, Julie Osborn, Valerie Gregory, Jaime Marotte, Bonnie Sutherland, Doug Wilson, Mercedes Jones, Jon Hermison, Desiree Hatton, Alex Strack, Sarah Miller, Tomas Eggers, Sahand Rastegarpour, Randy Barnard

Public

Sue Mosburg, Norah Duffy

Item 1 – Introductions

- Christine Gordon, Assistant Deputy Director acted as moderator for this meeting. Meeting was held via video/teleconference and in person at the CalEPA building.

Item 2 – Agenda Review

- Christine Gordon reviewed the agenda for all, asked if anyone had time constraints and needed to present before their turn. There were no comments agenda proceeded as scheduled. It was explained that the meeting is being recorded and requested to speak up with your name and who you represent when speaking to ensure accuracy.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- There were no public comments.

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Item 4 – Presentations

- Christine Gordon gave an update on OOC staffing shortage. At last meeting OOC was at a 45% vacancy rate, currently, the rate is reduced to 13% with all manager positions filled. OOC anticipates that all vacancies will be filled by August 1, 2023. During the staffing shortage, the application processing times remain within 45 days.
- We cannot do this without our partners commitment, and dedication – committee members and stakeholders. Christine announced Joe Karkoski is on the phone, on video and wanted to say a few words.
- Joe thanked everyone for their dedication. We're very excited with all the new staff and the Operator Certification Program moving forward. There has been a big transition, all positive with the engagement we've been having and looking forward to recommendations and coming up with solutions.
- Christine read the letter and certificate of appreciation the Advisory Committee members will be receiving.
- There are five advisory committee positions ending June 30, 2023. One position has been vacant since 2019. There will be a final approval within the next couple of weeks.

Item 5 – Division of Drinking Water (DDW) – Regulating Direct Potable Reuse

- Randy gave an overview of all 2023 updates and prior year updates.
- Perchlorate detection limits for purposes of reporting (DLR) regulations became effective July 2021. Due to this, the count of sample stations has increased 60% over the last six months. With this increase, it better tells us where in the State the problems are.
- The definition of "Microplastics" was adopted in June 2020, and the microplastics policy handbook was adopted in September 2022. Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) accreditation was in September 2022 and pre monitoring orders started on May 22, 2023. The State Water Board leads the nation in microplastic research and regulation despite the timeline delays. DDW regulations are being worked on by priority in this order:
 - Hex Chrome
 - Arsenic
 - Perfluoro-octanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluoro-octane sulfonic acid (PFOS)
 - N-nitroso-dimethylamine (NDMA)
 - Disinfection byproducts
 - Styrene
 - Cadmium and Mercury

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- There is a financial burden on smaller systems and the draft regulation text will be released June 16, 2023, with a workshop August 2, 2023, to receive public comments.
- Regulatory Priorities - see DDW's website: [Drinking Water Programs | California State Water Resources Control Board](#) .
- Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) - Consists of wastewater (WW) to drinking water (DW) treatment intakes. DDW expects to have DPR regulations completed by December 2023. The proposed rulemaking will be posted on July 11, 2023. California is first in the world to regulate DPR, with groundwater recharge and surface water augmentation for non-potable use and raw water augmentation/treated water augmentation for potable use.
- Groundwater recharge is WW to reclaimed to injection wells and stays there for years. There are currently 10 permitted projects.
- Indirect Potable Reuse (IPR) is indirect surface water augmentation. WW treated with reverse osmosis and ultraviolet disinfection (RO/UV) to a reservoir/lake/raw water supply to a DW treatment plant will be online in the next year or so. DPR shows a lack of environmental barrier, not effective or none at all. Extra treatment and monitoring adopted by the end of 2023 to allow DPR treated water augmentation straight from WW treatment plant straight to homes. Onsite treatment and reuse for multi-family residential, commercial, and building formal rulemaking in August 2023, and final Board consideration in September 2023. The Board will consider a revision, update, and replacement of the current cross-connection control policy handbook with testing and certification requirements in late 2023. In April 2021, this was brought up with hundreds of comments and in December 2022 with more comments. There will be 2 public hearings.
- Recycled Water Regulation - an update to the Title 17 cross connection needs to be completed prior to the recycled water regulations Title 22 being revised. DDW is looking at two years down the road possibly.
- Lead and Copper Rule – we are waiting for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lead and copper rule to be set before DDW decides on improvements.
- Metal DLR's -_reduce Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL) with Environmental Laboratory Technical Advisory Committee (ELTAC). There was a pre rulemaking workshop in November 2022.
- Lower priorities include primacy packages to align with EPA/Federal requirements for funding, lowering Manganese Notification Level/Response Level (NL/RL's), and lowering Algal Blooms NL/RL's. Need financial assurance, minimum acceptable capability of feasibility, and upgrading systems.

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Item 6 – Drinking Water and Wastewater Operator Certification Programs
Advisory Committee Sub Workgroups

Guidelines on Reporting Drinking Water Operator Experience

- Michael Maestas presented on behalf of the group.
- Presented a draft document with recommendations for updated experience requirements for DW treatment and DW distribution operator certification, Grades 3-5.
- To use this document if accepted as a supplemental experience document on the operator certification website and operator certification providing all links to this document. It includes additions to the required supervisor letter being signed by the operators' immediate supervisor and the chief operator of the water discipline they are applying for DW treatment/DW distribution, name, position, certification numbers, system name and classification. Proposing an annual review of this document. Mike went over entire document with experience examples and referred all to download it including definitions, minimum qualifications for treatment and distribution experience guidelines, additional experience time for shift and chief operators, experience substitutions and advance water treatment in the future. If adopted operator certification's web page will include links to all documents, samples of supervisor letters and Grades T4 and D5 certification applications.
- Questions? Mike Answered questions.
 - Steve Molino- are there provisions for recycled water operators in this document? *No, recycled water is not incorporated into this document.*
 - John Brady- aside from the supervisor letter and required signatures is there anything else required from systems to prove accountability? *We have recommended to have the immediate supervisor and the chief operator both sign the letter instead of previously needing one signature.*
 - Does it exclude the general manager from decision? Is the chief operator required to sign a letter for poor performing employees? Who says operator has achieved competency? *The chief operator is responsible for all of this.*
 - With a 40/20 split the operator can manipulate his/her hours. 40/20 double dipping? Is this, OK? *Yes, as long as criteria is met.*
 - Tim Collie-Thank you this is long overdue. Is the job description approved by the State or water entity. *Job description is from water entity.*

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- Bill Cardinal- T3 chief operator at a T3 DW facility- should be able to be granted a T5 certificate if they're not working at a T4 facility because of the grade and site requirement for T5 certification.
 - *John Brady responded – At a T5 water system there is a higher risk of public impact treating more gallons of water. In the interest of public health, experience is built incrementally.*
 - *Bill Cardinal responded- DDW treatment plant classification is based on the number of treatment processes as opposed to the number of gallons produced and population served.*
 - *Larry Lyford responded- He understands both sides of the argument, but this is more about the application process, an annual review will include improvements. Let's revisit this another time.*
- Ian Tillery – chief plant operator (CPO) letter vs. supervisor letter. Can CPO write their own letter? What if the general manager is the CPO? How do they go about getting authorization for their experience?
 - *Mike – This would be answered by the state.*
 - *Christine – Whoever the CPO reports to would sign document. The hierarchy and structure of organization would be reviewed to look at who is at top of structure.*
- Katie Porter – are there current timeframe processing recommendations?
Within four weeks of receipt of a complete application.
- Steve Garner – DW treatment operators working at an Advanced Water Treatment Facility (AWTF) classified as a WW facility are not getting DW treatment experience credit.
 - *Christine – This will possibly come up in the One Water Regime recommendations.*
 - *Mike- Now it is an existing experience substitution only.*
- Sue Mosburg – What should be in a certification package? Should this be added to the document? Might the examples be reformed over time?
 - *Mike- We would update the examples using existing forms and regulations.*
- Tomas Eggers – Thanked Mike for all the work. Clarify absolute values up to a certain number of hours. When would that be evaluated and by whom?
 - *Mike – maximum weekly hours available to an operator who falls under each category, supervisor letter will decide number of hours.*
- Steve Molino – Would the chief operator sign off on the certification if the chief operator has no responsibility over the operator? In some cases, the CPO is working in operations only.

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- *Christine – This would be a concern if the CPO is not responsible for the operators.*
- *Larry Lyford – For a distribution operator it would be the distribution chief operator not the CPO. The supervisor still signs the letter, then the chief operator additionally signs. When the chief operator signs, it puts teeth in it.*
- *Christine – Thank you for the clarification, Larry. I agree that the chief operator should get involved to put his stamp of certification on it.*
- *Yan Zhang – Agree, that was the intention of the work group to provide the chief operator in addition to the supervisor signature.*
- Julie - CAUTION! The State Water Board cannot approve or post anything that conflicts with current regulations. Conversation about distribution operators not getting experience credit unless certified, incorrect guidance not from the Division of Financial Assistance (DFA).
 - *Sue Mosburg – Yes, they can, see regulations. When making decisions about regulations, certification needs to be included.*
- Julie – When regulations are updated this will be recognized and updated.
 - *Sue- The current regulations are being interpreted that way; the industry hope is regulations need to change. The guidance document needs to reflect those changes.*
- Christine – bringing forward to DW Operator Certification Advisory Committee for a vote. We need to go back and identify considerations: agree, update, or deny/reject. If we do not vote today, we cannot vote until January 2024. Everyone voting will need to be here in person if this happens.
- Voting commenced.

WW Operator In Training (OIT) Requirements and Experience

- Chris Castaing presented on behalf of the group.
- Proposed an online survey to solicit feedback, revise educational requirements by eliminating or lowering hours necessary. Recommend that educational credits can be earned after OIT certificates are issued, while gaining certification hours simultaneously. This allows people to get into the trade as other operators age and retire. Educational credits are not necessary to learn OIT duties while gaining experience. Agencies to establish OIT apprenticeship programs approved by the State. This will provide more flexibility to smaller systems.

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- Steven Garner – Who will approve the criteria? Then who will approve at the State? *Responsibility placed on individual agencies if they choose to develop an OIT apprenticeship program.*
- Josh Viera – the State will approve multiple programs? Not sure what benefit this would have.
 - *Sue Mosburg – Gives the opportunity on all sides of the house DW treatment, DW distribution, WW to have experience guidelines. Lots of work to be done on what an apprenticeship program would consist of. Is this a path that would be supported?*
 - *Norah Duffy – We realize it's a heavy lift but would inject flexibility.*
- John Brady – Agencies responsibility? How does this benefit an agency? Lessening education – bad.
 - *Monte Hamamoto – Large agencies have programs established but they have to obtain OIT certificate first to complement their program. They want the programs they've been using for years to be approved by the State.*
 - *Jose Martinez – Paid OIT position could be cost prohibitive to smaller agencies. Smaller WW systems could hire with approved plan in lieu of OIT certificate.*
- Louis Sun - If an agency has a program approved will an OIT certificate then be issued. *An approved program would take the place of an OIT certificate, and they could apply for a WW grade level certificate. The intention is apprenticeship hours would apply towards certification. Per regulations they must be holding a certificate, does not stipulate an OIT certificate. Would require a change in regulations, State funding for changes, and would qualify you for a Grade I WW certificate.*
- Steve Garner – Issue a certificate?
 - *Julie - Yes, would have to be a certificate, not necessarily an OIT certificate.*
 - *Sue Mosburg – when this started it was a wish list of what changes were wanted in your perfect world.*
 - *Norah Duffy – OIT is controversial. It works for some agencies, not for others. Potential path forward may lead to some improvements.*
 - *John Brady – Option one gives WW operators an easier way to get in.*
 - *Steven Garner - If earned after program there are funding concerns, an undue burden to say yes.*

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- *Christine - Advisory Committee to decide priorities. If accepted, how do we move forward? We will need the Advisory Committee to recommend criteria.*
- *Sue Mosburg - Is this a direction we want to go and put effort into? Shift for further development.*
- *Dr. Ramsey Mahmood – details to be figured out later. Let's vote on principle of requirement.*
- Steve Creighton – I'm confused. Is the subgroup bringing recommendations forward, then meet and move forward? DW moving to staff levels, subgroup voted. We want this program, will State approve? Need more detail and specificity.
 - *Norah – opening the door and pushing it forward.*
 - *Julie – Vote or work longer to be approved or say no completely. We have options. A vote to approve will bring it to staff level.*
- Steve Molina – Is recycled included in OIT at all?
 - *Christine – No, recycled will be in One Water Regime.*
- Voting commenced.

One Water Regime

- Greg Williams presented on behalf of the group.
- 1. A certified DW treatment operator could qualify for their AWT experience for DW treatment certifications provided regulations, Title 22, would allow for this. Or would it require a regulation change?
- 2. To increase collaboration between DW and WW for a one water future. We should consider joint meetings – communication and collaboration are essential.
- WW operator experience needs a job task analysis survey sent out every 5-7 years for exam criteria questions. Jon Strutzel and Annette Caraway did it for DW exams and needs to be done for WW exams.
 - Steven Garner– Tertiary water? Distribution purple pipes? DPR?
 - *Greg – has not been talked about.*
 - Brian Bernados – Will there be an AWT certification committee? How will AWT be defined?
 - *Greg – AWT processes to be included are in our recommendations.*
 - *Brian – We know those questions need to be addressed.*
 - *John Brady – Need an experience credit chart for AWT like Mike's for DW. This process will prompt conversation between DW and WW for what that process will look like.*
 - *Steve Garner – both DW and WW Advisory Committee members can vote on AWT.*

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- Voting commenced.

Assembly Bill 1588

- Jose Martinez presented on behalf of the group.
- Will military experience require regulation changes for exams? Evaluating experience bodies include American Council on Education, COOL, My Next Move, O*Net Online, Military Crosswalk, Ca-Nevada AWWA basecamp. Revise guidelines for application reviews, revise exam and certification applications and possible supplemental form for military experience, reciprocity, or exam waiver. Update our guidelines to reflect military guidelines and procedure changes. Update existing Advisory Committee groups to include military representative. Recommend more frequent joint meetings – quarterly?
 - Steven Garner - Is it acceptable to consider subgroup points to reflect on applications?
 - Jose – Propose supplemental form for military experience, like Mike Maestas' guidelines?
 - *Christine – The guidelines you are referring to are for DW only not WW. Sue was looking for procedures to go over applications.*
 - Sue/Steve recommend changes to proposal and get WW guidelines done.
 - Christine - What are we voting on in terms of recommendations?
 - Mike – Is there a negative impact on voting?
 - Steve Krai – So many Advisory Committee and joint meetings might overload State staff? Work should be done by subcommittees and then present.
 - Christine – Suggests going forward with vote, if modifications are necessary, please state that when voting.
- Voting commenced.

Item 7 – Meeting Recap and Next Steps

- Christine informed the Advisory Committees that due to the meeting running over time, the meeting recap and next meeting date will be scheduled via email.