

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – May 13, 2026**

Meeting Date: Wednesday, May 13, 2026

Attendees: Advisory Committee Members

Jack Bebee, Bryan Miller, Doug Culbert, Jose Martinez, Jose J. Martinez, Ian Tillery, Mike Maestas, Sean Abbey, Derek Nguyen, John Hamner

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Josh Ziese, Keisha Kelley, Jon Hermison, Valerie Gregory, Sarah Miller, Antonio Aguilar, Helen Wuellner, German Myers, Bryan Elder, Sahand Rastegarpour

Public

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Item 1 – Introductions

- Keisha Kelley, OOC Program Manager, acted as moderator for this meeting. The meeting was held via Video/Teleconference and in person at the California Environmental Protection Agency building located at 1001 I Street, Sacramento, California 95814.

Item 2 – Agenda Review

- Keisha Kelley reviewed the agenda and proceeded as scheduled with a reminder that the meeting is being recorded for note taking purposes only and will be deleted after meeting minutes are prepared.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- No public comments

Item 4 – Office of Enforcement (OE) Updates

- German Myers provided an OE update for November 2025 to present:
 - 10 new cases:
 - 2 cases of exam misconduct;
 - 2 cases for falsification of reported data;

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- 1 case of submission of false or misleading information on an application for certification;
- 1 case of failure to maintain a chief operator; and
- 4 cases of performing operations with an expired certificate or inappropriate grade level.
- 2 pending actions:
 - Suspension of the operator's certificate for falsification of reported lab data; and
 - Reprimand of an operator.
- 6 cases closed:
 - 1 case of operator misconduct;
 - 2 cases of exam misconduct;
 - 1 case of failure to maintain a chief operator; and
 - 2 cases of performing operations with an expired certificate or inappropriate grade level.

Item 5 – Treatment 5 Exam Format Subcommittee Update

- Presentation provided by Advisory Committee member Mike Maestas ([Attachment A](#))
- Committee Information
 - Subcommittee members include: Mike Maestas (Chair), Jack Bebee (Vice Chair), Ian Tillery, Derek Ngyuen, Bryan Miller.
 - Meetings are held once a month and started January 9, 2026.
- Subcommittee Goals
 - Identify issues impacting the T5 certification process
 - Determine if the existing exam process/format requires change
 - Establish recommendations for the Advisory Committee
- T5 certification survey
 - On February 13, 2026, a survey was sent out to operators to understand the industry's needs.
 - There were 181 participants and the contents of the survey were as follows:
 - Section 1 – Background and Context: 9 questions
 - Section 2 – Purpose of the T5 Certification: 3 questions
 - Section 3 – Operational Competency and Risk: 3 questions
 - Section 4 – Regulatory Knowledge and Application: 3 questions
 - Section 5 – Leadership and Professional Expectations: 3 questions
 - Section 6 – Overall alignment and improvement: 5 questions

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Item 6 – Program Updates

- OOC Staffing Update
 - The OOC has remained fully staffed.
 - Processing times have remained consistently within the DWOP's policy of 45-days from receipt of an application.
- Program Statistics ([Attachment B](#))
 - Attachment B was reviewed with the Advisory Committee
 - In addition to the standard statistics presented, data requested at the Fall 2025 Advisory Committee Meeting was presented, including:
 - Annual number of valid certificates from 2013 through 2024
 - Annual number of certified operators from 2013 through 2024
 - Computer based testing exam score summary reports
 - The Advisory Committee requested to have this information presented more regularly at future committee meetings.
 - The Advisory Committee requested historical T5 exam pass/fail rates to be presented at future committee meetings.
- Online Application Portal
 - The OOC, in coordination with the State Water Board's Division of Information Technology, has continued development of an interactive online application portal to allow applicants the ability to submit applications electronically, review and resolve application deficiencies and track application status.
 - As of February 2025, examination applications for all disciplines and grade levels can be submitted electronically through the Operator Information System (OCIS) portal.
 - As of July 2025, wastewater renewal applications for all grade levels can be submitted electronically through the portal.
 - As of February 2026, drinking water renewal applications for both disciplines and grade levels can be submitted electronically through the portal.
 - Currently, the OOC is working with the State Water Boards Division of Information Technology on the development of electronic certification applications.
 - As the OOC has been building out the portal and deploying electronic applications, operators should be aware of the following adjustments to OOC processes:
 - OOC is still mailing out renewal reminder notices; however, the format of those notices has changed. Operators are now receiving

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a letter in the mail reminding them of their upcoming renewal due date with information on how they may renew online, by mail, and pay online.

- OOC now sends paperless notifications and status updates concerning applications (received and awaiting payment, under review once the payment has been applied, deficient, approved, and denied). Operators should verify, through the portal, that their email address is accurate to ensure they receive the paperless notifications.
- Customer Service Survey ([Attachment C](#))
 - The semi-annual customer service survey results were provided to Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in March of this calendar year.
 - The survey results cover the 6-month period of September 2025 through February 2026.
 - There were 14 respondents total for this survey period and the weighted average for overall experience with the OOC program was 3.5 out of 5.
 - Respondents are not required to provide a response to every question; they may skip questions and are given the opportunity to provide additional comments or suggestions to improve the program and leave their contact information. Respondents that leave contact information are contacted by the OOC to address and resolve any issues, if applicable.
 - Survey results covering the 6-month period of March 2026 through August 2026 will be provided to advisory committee members and stakeholders via email in September 2026.
- Progress on Regulatory Revisions
 - Over the past year, OOC staff have made a considerable amount of progress on completing regulatory updates for both programs. A lot of progress has been made on the scoping of regulatory updates needed for the DWOCP. However, the initial outline is still in process internally.
 - The DWOCP regulations were last updated in 2001 and based on scoping, the rulemaking package is expected to require significant amendments.
 - The OOC intends to complete the scoping phase near the end of 2026 and begin the drafting phase of the rulemaking process in early 2027.
- Fee Changes ([Attachment D](#))
 - Authority, guiding principles, and processes pursuant to subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890, the State Water Board is required to review its fees each fiscal year to ensure that the fees

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collected provide sufficient revenue to recover the costs of the DWOCP and to compensate for past over-collection or under-collection of revenue. Subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890 also authorizes the State Water Board to adopt amendments to the program's fees through the emergency rulemaking process. The emergency regulations remain in effect until they are revised by the State Water Board.

- When reviewing the program's fund, the goal is to ensure that the fees generate sufficient revenue to cover program expenditures and that they work within legislative budgetary authority.
- The fee-setting process consists of:
 - An annual review of program expenditures and revenues including actuals for prior years as well as estimates for current year and projections for future years;
 - Determining if the fee schedule needs adjustments;
 - Conducting an advisory committee meeting to discuss the adjustments and proposed changes to fee schedules;
 - Taking the fee schedule proposed changes to the Board for approval; and
 - Implementing the approved fee schedule changes via the emergency rulemaking process.
- Background
 - The DWOCP's revenue comes from fees paid by applicants and certified operators for various services associated with certification. There are approximately 34,000 valid certificates held by approximately 25,000 water operators. The operational expenses for the program fall into three broad areas: 1) issuing and renewing certificates; 2) administering operator examinations; and 3) enforcement against operators, water distribution system owners, and water treatment facility owners that have violated the programs Regulations. More specifically, the DWOCP's responsibilities include:
 - Processing certification applications;
 - Processing renewals for approximately 34,000 certificates once every 3 years;
 - Processing examination applications;
 - Administering examinations through CBT;
 - Maintaining physical files, the Operator Certification database (OCIS), and the programs website;
 - Conducting outreach and customer education, as necessary;
 - Investigating complaints of misconduct and conducting appropriate enforcement actions;

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- Amending the program's Regulations, as necessary; and
 - Coordinating with the DWOCP Advisory Committee.
- Program Revenue and Expenditures
 - The costs to administer the program have consistently outpace the revenue that the program collects. Although the level of effort to administer the program has remained relatively steady and no additional staff are anticipated for future operations, the operating costs are anticipated to rise significantly next fiscal year (FY).
 - Currently, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund – Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding is temporarily being used to subsidize expenditures. As a result, the programs expenditures have been lower.
 - However, beginning next FY the BIL funding currently subsidizing expenditures will no longer be available, resulting in an increase in expenditures.
 - The program currently has a fund balance of approximately \$3.3 million, and expenditures are estimated to exceed revenues by approximately \$506,000. Fee increases are necessary to close the gap between expenditures and revenues, and to ensure that enough revenue is collected to cover expenditures once the BIL funding is no longer available.
 - Two options were evaluated to achieve this:
 - Option 1: fee increases of 36 percent in FY 2026-2027 (resulting in an estimated revenue of \$2,245,000) and 36 percent in FY 2027-2028 (resulting in an estimated revenue of \$3,054,000).
 - Option 2: fee increases of 25 percent in FY 2026-2027 (resulting in an estimated revenue of \$2,064,000), 25 percent in FY 2027-2028 (resulting in an estimated revenue of \$2,580,000), and 25 percent in FY 2028-2029 (resulting in an estimated revenue of \$3,225,000).
 - The OOC recommended option 2, three years of fee increases at equal rates. Option 2 would increase all fees next FY by 25%.
 - The expected fund balance next FY and the estimated amount of revenue generated by the proposed fee increase would be sufficient to cover the estimated expenditures, leave a fund balance for cushion, and begin correcting the gap between expenditures and revenue.
 - Expenditures will still exceed revenue by approximately \$831,000 and subsequent fee increases of 25% are projected to fully close the gap and maintain a prudent fund reserve.

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- The OOC will conduct a review of the program's fund each FY to confirm the appropriate amount of fee increase needed and bring it back to the advisory committee for review and comment.
- Advisory Committee members were in support of option 2, three years of fee increases at equal rates.
- Discussion was had regarding the DWOCP fee structure. The DWOCP fees are structured proportional to the cost of the service being provided to recover the cost incurred but not to exceed the amount necessary, pursuant to subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890.
- Discussion was had regarding whether or not it was common practice for water agencies to reimburse operators for DWOCP fees. This varies among water agencies.

Meeting Recap

- The OOC will reach out via email no later than July or August to begin scheduling the next meeting for the Fall.

Action Items

- The T5 Exam subcommittee to provide T5 exam recommendations at the fall meeting.
- The OOC to continue to provide statistics showing the annual number of valid certificates, annual number of certified operators, and computer-based testing exam score summary reports.
- The OOC to provide historical T5 exam pass/fail rates to review trends at the fall meeting.
- The OOC to provide high-level milestones for the regulatory process, with estimated dates.