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## State Water Resources Control Board

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# DRINKING WATER TREATMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

**Q-1. Where can I get a copy of the operator certification regulations and statutes?**

A. The operator certification regulations and statutes are available on the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program's website at:

[http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking\\_water/certlic/occupations/DWopcert.shtml](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/occupations/DWopcert.shtml)

**Q-2. Who must be certified?**

A. For Distribution of potable water, an individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(b) must possess a distribution operator certificate. An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(c or d) must possess either a distribution operator certificate or a treatment operator certificate.

For Treatment of potable water, an individual who takes an action or makes a decision to control the quality of potable water needs to be certified.

**Q-3. How do I become certified?**

A. Becoming certified is a two-step process. An initial application and filing fee is submitted to participate in the examination. This application will be evaluated for the **educational** requirement. Once that application has been approved you will be allowed to participate in the examination.

If you are successful in passing the examination, you will have three years (from the date of the exam) to meet the requirements and submit the request for certification. For Grades 1 and 2 you must submit a certification request and filing fee to obtain the certificate. For Grades 3-5 you must submit a certification application, supporting documentation, and filing fee. This certification application will be evaluated for the **experience** portion of the requirement. If you fulfill the experience requirement, you will be issued a certificate.

**Q-4. If I submit an application, for either examination or certification, and I do not meet the minimum qualifications (MQs), will I get a refund of my filing fee?**

A. No. If you are unsure of the MQs for either taking an examination or becoming certified, please contact this office for clarification. Your application will not be evaluated over the telephone, but the analyst will explain the MQs clearly enough for you to make your own determination. *Please note: all education requirements must be fulfilled prior to the exam deadline date before you will be approved to take an examination; all experience requirements must be fulfilled before you are issued a certificate.*

**Q-5. When the application requests verification of specialized training or verification of a college degree, what documentation must I submit?**

A A legible photocopy of either an official transcript (issued to you by the college) or certificate of completion must be submitted with your application. The documentation must indicate the name of the course, date completed, and the number of units (or hours) you were awarded for successful completion of the course.

**Q-6. If I have a Title I, ADA disability that allows me special testing accommodations, what documentation must I submit with my application to be allowed such accommodations?**

A. A letter from a professional authorized to make such assessments must be submitted with your application. The documentation must be signed and on letterhead. It must state the type of special testing accommodation required.

**Q-7. What do the "Ts" and "Ds" mean on the operator certificate, distribution system classification, and treatment facility classification?**

A. A "T" prefix is used to indicate treatment and a "D" prefix is used to indicate distribution. Either a "T" or a "D" now precedes all operator grades, as well as treatment facility classifications and distribution system classifications.

**Q-8. If I am already certified as a water treatment operator, does that make me eligible to be certified as a distribution operator at the same level?**

- A. No. The treatment operator certification and distribution operator certification are independent of one another. Having one does not qualify an operator for the other. As an example, a T3 treatment operator may only meet the requirements for a D1 or D2 distribution certificate, and vice versa.

**Q-9. What grade level certification must an operator hold?**

- A. If an operator has been designated by the water supplier as the Chief Operator or Shift Operator, the operator must be certified at the level specified by the following table. Operators that have not been designated as Chief or Shift Operator may be certified at any grade level.

Treatment/Distribution Classification	Min. Certification of Chief Operator	Min Certification of Shift Operator
T1/D1	T1/D1	T1/D1
T2/D2	T2/D2	T1/D1
T3/D3	T3/D3	T2/D2
T4/D4	T4/D4	T3/D3
T5/D5	T5/D5	T3/D3

**Q-10. If a water distribution system or treatment facility has only one Chief Operator, can that operator ever go on vacation?**

- A. The regulation specifies the following requirements: each distribution system and treatment facility must designate (1) at least one Chief Operator for each system or facility, and (2) at least one Shift Operator for each operating shift.

In addition, the regulation requires that either the Chief or Shift Operator must be available as specified. The regulation does not require both the Chief and Shift Operator to be available. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Chief Operator is the individual who has overall responsibility for the operation of the distribution system or treatment facility and, therefore, it is the Chief Operator’s decision to determine whether or not a Chief Operator should be available at all times and whether or not the Chief Operator can be absent for a period of time without designating a replacement Chief Operator. If a replacement Chief Operator is designated, that operator must be certified at a level equal to or greater than the system or facility.

**Q-11. If my certificate was revoked can I reapply for certification?**

- A. If the certificate was revoked as the result of negligence or fraud the operator cannot reapply for certification. If the certificate was revoked because the operator failed to complete the renewal, and it has been revoked for more than one year, the operator will need to take and pass an examination in order to be eligible for certification.

**Q-12. What water systems need certified water treatment and distribution operators?**

- A. As required by (Section 106885, Health and Safety Code), all public water systems that have water treatment facilities require certified water treatment operators, except that water systems that only use disinfection facilities for groundwater, where no Giardia or virus reduction is required, can meet the operator certification requirements with a certified distribution operator. All community and non-transient noncommunity public water systems with or without water treatment facilities must have certified distribution operators.

**Q-13. Do the regulations contain any provisions for operators in training?**

A. No. Operators that are new to the field are eligible for T1, T2, D1, or D2 certificates without having any operator experience. To obtain higher certifications, operators will need to have operator experience.

**Q-14. If I lose my original certificate can I get a new one?**

A. Yes. You must send a written request to the office including your name, address, operator number and grade. Send this information along with a check or money order in the amount of \$25, made out to the **SWRCB-DWOCP**.

**Q-15. What are the operator certification requirements for a transient, non-community water system?**

Type of Water Source	Type of Treatment	Type of Certification Required
Groundwater	None	None required
Groundwater	Chlorination	Distribution or Treatment
Groundwater	Other treatment	Treatment
Groundwater Under the Direct Influence of Surface Water	Chlorination/Filtration-disinfection	Treatment
Surface Water	Filtration and Disinfection	Treatment

**EXAM REQUIREMENTS**

**Q-16. When are certification exams offered?**

A. Distribution exams are offered twice a year in March and September. The final filing date for the March exam is January 2nd and the final filing date for the September exam is July 1st.

Treatment exams are offered twice a year in May and November. The final filing date for the May exam is March 1st and the final filing date for the November exam is September 1st.

**Q-17. How do I know what to study for the examination?**

A. The document called *Expected Range of Knowledge* tells you for each grade level what can be on the exam. Also, the document *Suggested Reading*, suggests study reference materials. These documents may be found on the website ([https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking\\_water/certlic/occupations/DWopcert.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/occupations/DWopcert.html))

**Q-18. What is considered acceptable specialized training to qualify for the examination?**

A. Specialized training means college level courses providing training in drinking water treatment or drinking water distribution offered by an accredited academic institution or an organization accredited by the International Association of Continuing Education Training (IACET). A list of previously approved courses may be found on our website.

**Q-19. How do I know if a course I would like to take or have taken will be acceptable as a specialized training course?**

A. You can see if the course you took is listed on our website under *Specialized Training Courses*. These are courses that have been reviewed and approved for specialized training. If it is not on the list you can request the program to review it for consideration as an approved course.

**Q-20. I have taken several short courses over the last year for continuing education that adds up to 36 contact hours. Will that be acceptable as specialized training?**

A. No. A specialized training course must be a single course at least 36 hours long.

**Q-21. I will complete my specialized training course after the final filing date but before the exam. Can I use it to qualify for the current exam?**

A. No. All exam requirements must be met prior to the final filing date to ensure that we may properly review your application. Any courses completed after the final filing date will be reviewed for the next exam cycle.

**Q-22. I have not completed any specialized training courses, but I do have a college degree. Will my degree qualify me to take the exam?**

A. No. A college degree will not meet the specialized training requirement. In some cases, a few of the courses completed while obtaining your degree may qualify as specialized training.

**Q-23. I took a specialized training course ten years ago. Will you accept that?**

A. Yes, as long as that course can be verified through the college and it meets the definition of specialized training.

**Q-24. If I previously used a course to get into the Grade 2 exam can I submit that course again for the Grade 3 exam?**

A. Yes. Once we have accepted your course for the purposes of meeting the exam requirements it can be used for the next level of exam.

**Q-25. Can I take an exam without having any operator experience?**

- A. Yes. There are no experience requirements to participate in an exam. Experience is a certification requirement. It is required to become certified at grade 3 and above for both water treatment and water distribution. We strongly encourage you to review the certification experience requirements before you apply for an exam to make sure you can meet those qualifications.

**Q-26. Can I skip the Grade 1 exam and take the Grade 2 exam instead?**

- A. Yes, as long as you meet the grade 2 exam requirements.

**Q-27. What do I need to bring with me to the examination?**

- A.
1. The examination notice card sent to you by the State Water Board.
  2. Valid government-issued photo ID with signature. Picture ID is mandatory for admittance into the exam. Acceptable forms of ID are driver's license, DMV non-driver ID, current U.S. passport with signature, or military ID.
  3. Simple electronic calculator. **No** programmable calculators, calculators with an alpha keyboard, water specific calculators, or calculators with tape print-out are allowed.
  4. A supply of sharpened No. 2 wooden pencils with erasers.

**Q-28. What happens if I arrive at the exam late?**

- A. Applicants are requested to arrive 30 – 60 minutes prior to the start of the exam. There will be no admittance into the examination after the proctor has begun giving the exam instructions. If you arrive after the exam has started, you will need to reapply for a subsequent exam.

**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS**

**Q-29. Why do I have to fill out another application for certification after I already filled out the exam application?**

- A. The exam application and certification application require different information. The exam requirements are related to your education. Certification requirements are based on your experience.

**Q-30. I passed the T3 exam but do not have experience as a certified T2 operator what are my options?**

- A. You can apply for certification as a T2 operator. If you are able to meet the T3 experience requirements within three years of passing the exam you can then apply for T3 certification.

**Q-31. I supervise a crew of six distribution operators who perform water distribution duties. Do I get experience credit for supervising this crew?**

- A. Yes. Supervision of other persons **operating** the water distribution system counts as experience. Operating refers to those processes that require distribution certification such as installing, tapping, disinfecting, flushing and connecting water mains.

**Q-32. I design water systems on a CAD (Computer Aided Design). Is that considered water distribution experience?**

- A. No. You do not need to be certified to design a water system.

**Q-33. In my job I perform both water treatment and distribution duties. How will you determine my distribution experience?**

- A. Many operators perform both water treatment and water distribution duties. The analyst will request a letter from your immediate supervisor or Chief Operator to determine how much time you spend performing each function. This Supervisor letter should define the number of hours worked in each discipline.

**Q-34. What information is required for you to review my experience?**

- A. In order for us to evaluate your experience, you need to send us your utility's official job description and organizational chart with names and titles included. A letter (signed and on company letterhead) from your immediate supervisor or Chief Operator outlining your daily duties as they relate to water treatment or distribution and the number of hours you spend on each. Also requested is the letter classifying your water system/plant.

## **RENEWAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE) REQUIREMENTS**

**Q-35. How will I know when it's time to renew my certificate?**

- A. The State Water Board will send a courtesy renewal notice to the operator when it is time to renew the certificate. However, it is ultimately the operator's responsibility to keep track of the certificate's expiration date and to submit the renewal application during the appropriate time frame. It is also the responsibility of the operator to notify the Department within 60 days of any change in address or name (section 63840(a)). The change of address form may be found on our website at:

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking\\_water/certlic/occupations/documents/occert/add\\_change.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/occupations/documents/occert/add_change.pdf)



A list of currently certified operators is available on our website.

**Q-36. How much continuing education (CE) is required to renew my certificate and when must I get it?**

- A. Water treatment and distribution certificates must be renewed every three years and obtaining CE contact hours is a requirement for renewal (Regulation Section 63840). The number of hours depends on the level of certification. These contact hours must be obtained between your renewal due dates.

<u>Certificate Grade</u>	<u>Contact Hours Required</u>
T1 or D1	12
T2 or D2	16
T3 or D3	24
T4 or D4	36
T5 or D5	36

**Q-37. Does safety training count towards the CE requirement?**

- A. Operators may fulfill up to 25 percent of the required contact hours with safety training.

<u>Certificate Grade</u>	<u>Maximum # of Safety Hours Allowed</u>
T1 or D1	3
T2 or D2	4
T3 or D3	6
T4 or D4	9
T5 or D5	9

**Q-38. How will I know whether or not the training I want to take will be acceptable?**

- A. The subject matter must be specific to drinking water treatment or distribution, at least 50 minutes long, and the department must be able to verify the contact hours through the CE Provider.

**Q-39. What evidence should I keep in my records to prove that I've completed the required number of CE contact hours?**

- A. You should keep a copy of the certificate of completion, course syllabus and/or outline, record of the course title, CE Provider, contact number, location of the course, number of contact hours, and the date it was completed. You will be required to submit this information with your renewal application.

**Q-40. How many CE contact hours are college semester units worth?**

- A. One CE Unit is equal to 10 contact hours. A 3-unit college course is equal to 30 - 45 contact hours depending on whether it is a semester unit or quarter unit.

**Q-41. What must a water utility do to offer CE contact hours that are verifiable?**

- A.
1. Arrange for someone to conduct a training class on a subject specific to drinking water treatment or distribution.
  2. Track attendance with a sign-in/sign-out sheet during the class.
  3. Archive the following information (for five years) for verification purposes:
    - Title of course
    - Instructor
    - Sign-in/sign-out sheet
    - Number of contact hours offered
    - Training material or hand-outs (an explanation of the subject matter)
    - Location of training
    - Date of training
    - Contact information of CE Provider. (This could be anybody in the water utility that has access to the archived file.)
  4. Provide the above-mentioned information to each operator who attended the training. The operator will relay this information to the State Water Board during renewal. The State Water Board may contact the CE provider to verify the course.

For course approval, send the details of the course at least two weeks prior to the course start date to [DWCEU@Waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:DWCEU@Waterboards.ca.gov)

**Q-42. How does the Operator Certification Unit verify contact hours?**

- A. We use the information provided to us by the operator to contact the CE provider. The CE provider must be able to tell us what subject matter was taught, when and where the operator attended the course, and how many contact hours were provided. An operator cannot verify his or her own attendance.

**Q-43. What will happen if I do not have enough contact hours to meet the renewal requirements?**

- A. Your certificate will no longer be valid after the expiration date. The operator can re-activate the certificate within the first six months after the expiration date by paying any late fees and submitting the required number of contact hours. If you have not re-activated your certificate within that six-month period it will be revoked. A revoked certificate cannot be re-activated.

**Q-44. Can I work as a certified operator if my certificate is revoked or expired?**

- A. No, as per the statutes section 106885. In this section it states that a person who operates a water treatment plant or water distribution system shall possess a valid, unexpired operator certificate.

**QUESTIONS WATER SYSTEMS/FACILITIES MAY ASK**

**Q-45. How will I know what my treatment and distribution system classifications are?**

- A. The Drinking Water Field Operations Branch (DWFOB) will classify treatment facilities and distribution systems. Sections 64413.1 and 64412.3 of the regulations provide very specific classification criteria. If you have any questions you should contact your DWFOB district office.

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking\\_water/programs/documents/ddwem/DDWdistrictofficesmap.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/programs/documents/ddwem/DDWdistrictofficesmap.pdf)

**Q-46. If the water supplier hires a contractor to do work on the distribution system, does the contractor need to be certified?**

- A. If they make any decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770, they must be certified.

**Q-47. Does a distribution operator who has been designated as the emergency standby person need to be certified?**

- A. If the person is only a designated contact, and they in-turn contact a certified distribution operator without making any decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770, they do not need to be certified. However, the supplier does need to have a certified operator available to respond to emergencies.

**Q-48. Does a certified distribution operator need to be on-site?**

- A. A distribution operator needs to be on-site only if it is necessary to make decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770. If the certified operator can make an informed decision based only on information received over the telephone, or by other means, without actually being on-site to gather the information, then that operator does not need to be on-site.

**Q-49. Does a water system that provides only disinfected groundwater need to employ a certified treatment operator?**

A. If the treatment facility is not required to provide Giardia or virus inactivation pursuant to Section 64654(a), a certified treatment operator is not required. However, a certified distribution operator is required. Additionally, if the DWFOB determines that site-specific circumstances warrant the use of a certified treatment operator, that requirement can be made a condition of the water system permit.

**Q-50. If new tract homes are being constructed and a contractor is building the sewer and water systems, does that contractor need to be certified as a distribution operator?**

A. Probably not. The new construction is not a water distribution system until it is connected to the water supply and, therefore, the contractor is not required to be a certified distribution operator. The water supplier is responsible for the new system when it is connected to the existing distribution system. A certified distribution operator must make the decision that the new system is connected properly and has been appropriately tested.

**Q-51. If we are a small system and we have only one certified operator, how can that operator ever go on vacation?**

A. You can develop a partnership with other nearby water suppliers that would provide coverage of your system during times when your operator is on vacation.

**Q-52. Can a single operator serve as the Chief Operator for both the distribution system and the water treatment facility?**

A. Yes, as long as the operator is certified at the appropriate level for both treatment and distribution, the operator may serve as the Chief Operator for both.

**Q-53. If the local fire department is responsible for maintaining fire hydrants in the distribution system, must their personnel be certified in order to flush the hydrants?**

A. If the fire department is simply "exercising" the hydrants and the fire department isn't administering an intentional distribution system flushing program, certification would not be necessary. However, the water system should be aware that such flushing of hydrants can cause water quality problems and may wish to restrict or closely supervise such activities.

**Q-54. As the owner of a mobile home park that provides well water, must I obtain a distribution operator certificate?**

- A. No, you do not need to have a distribution operator certificate simply because you own the system. However, as the water supplier, you must designate at least one Chief Operator for the system, and that operator must have the appropriate certification (Section 64413.7(a)). You may designate yourself, in which case you would need to be certified, or you may hire or contract with an appropriately certified operator.

## **Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Frequently Asked Questions regarding Passage of Assembly Bill 2890**

On January 1, 2017, the following changes to the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) went into effect:

- Civil Liabilities may be imposed for Water Treatment and Water Distribution Operators.
- The Drinking Water Operator Certification Advisory Committee was established in Statute which states the committee will consist of ten members and lays out the organizations they represent.
- Allows for a discount fee for renewals or certifications for Water Treatment or Water Distribution operators that also hold a Wastewater certification.
- Allows operators that hold certification with the United States, a territory or tribal government or a unit of any of these to apply for reciprocity.
- Deleted obsolete language. Deleted Section 106895 Grandfather clause, Section 106896 Evaluation of AWWA distribution operator program.
- Deleted references to the Drinking Water “operator-in-training”.

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**1. Where can I find a copy of Assembly Bill 2890?**

For a complete copy of the bill and its history, go to the California Legislative information webpage at:

[http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201520160AB2890](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB2890)

**2. What happens if there is a conflict between what AB 2890 and the DWOCP Regulations?**

AB 2890 is California Law. Statements from AB 2890 supersede current Title 22 Drinking Water Operator Certification Regulation.

### **CIVIL LIABILITIES**

**3. What are administrative civil liabilities and will they affect me?**

Administrative civil liabilities are fines or other forms of action taken by the State Water Board against entities and/or individuals that commit a violation of the statutes.

**4. Who may be subject to administrative civil liabilities?**

Any person or entity who is in responsible charge of a water treatment plant or water distribution system, as well as anyone who operates a water treatment plant or distribution system, is subject to administrative civil liabilities.

**5. What violation do I have to commit to have administrative civil liabilities take effect? Violations may include but are not limited to:**

- Operate a water treatment plant or water distribution system without a valid or unexpired certification of the appropriate grade.
- In responsible charge and allowing the employment of any person as an operator who does not hold a valid, unexpired certification of the appropriate grade.
- Use of fraud or deception in the course of operating a water distribution system, a water treatment plant or a water recycling plant.
- Failure to use reasonable care or judgment in the operation of a water distribution system, a water treatment plant or a water recycling plant.
- Engaging in dishonest conduct during a water examination.
- Willful or negligent acts that cause or allow the violation of the federal or California Safe Drinking Water Act or the regulations and standards adopted pursuant to either act.
- Submitting false or misleading information on an exam or certification application.

**6. How much are the civil liabilities?**

Penalties range from \$100 per day to \$5,000 for each violation, depending upon the type of violation committed.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**7. How does this change the current stakeholders committee?**

Some current members of the committee may not be chosen to serve on the new committee; however the State Water Board does not foresee any substantial change in how the committee has operated.

The advisory committee shall consist of the following members:

- A. Two persons from a statewide organization representing medium to large water systems.
- B. Two persons from a statewide organization representing small water systems.
- C. One person from a local primacy agency.
- D. One person who is employed as an operator at a water recycling treatment plant.
- E. One person from an educational institution's school or division of engineering.
- F. One person who is a member of an organized labor union that represents water treatment operators and water distribution operators.
- G. One person who is employed by an educational institution, professional association, public agency, or private agency to provide water treatment or water distribution courses of instruction.
- H. One person who is a professional engineer specializing in sanitary engineering.

**8. *How does one become a member of the committee?***

The committee members have alternating terms. When the term expires for the members a notice will be posted on our website informing any interested parties that they should submit a personal biography which includes the nominee's name, address, phone number and name of employer. The package should also include the committee representation and a letter of acceptance from the nominee. Nominations should be submitted to: State Water Resources Control Board, Drinking Water Operator Certification Unit, P.O. Box 944212, Sacramento, CA 94244-2120.

**DISCOUNT FOR WASTEWATER CERTIFICATION**

**9. *When will the discount be available?***

The discount became available when the emergency regulations were approved in November 2017.

**10. *I hold a water certification as well as a wastewater certification. Will I receive a discount for both renewals?***

Yes, as long as both certifications are valid.

**11. *How much of a discount will I receive?***

You will receive the established discount fee for multiple certificates.

**12. *How do I apply for the discount?***

You will need to write your Wastewater Operator number on your Drinking Water renewal notice or certification request.

**13. *I hold both water distribution and water treatment certifications as well as a wastewater certification; will I get an additional discount on my water renewals?***

No, there is not an additional reduction for holding 3 certifications. You are already receiving the discount for holding both Water certifications.

**RECIPROCITY**

**14. *How does AB2890 affect reciprocity?***

AB 2890 amends the reciprocity provision to allow operators certified by United States, prescribed territories or tribal governments, or any unit thereof, to apply for certification through reciprocity.

**DELETED LANGUAGE**

**Operator-in-training**

**15. *How does AB2890 affect Operator-in-training?***

AB2890 deletes language regarding Operator-in-training (OIT) from Drinking Water Statutes only. This language was deleted from the Operator Certification Regulations in 2001.

**16. *Does this change affect the Wastewater OIT operators?***

No, there is no change to the Wastewater OIT program.



## **AWWA “Grandfathering”**

### ***17. How does AB2890 affect “grandfathering” of certifications from American Water Works Association (AWWA)?***

When the State of California initiated Distribution operator certification we accepted (“grandfathered”) operators that held a Distribution certificate issued by AWWA. Grandfathering was completed in December 2003 consequently the AWWA grandfathering section has been deleted.

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For more information about Drinking Water Treatment and Distribution Operator Certification, please call the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program at (916) 449-5611.