

Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP)
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes June 5, 2019

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members who were present: Jeff Carson, Chelsey Charbonneau Erickson (on behalf of Dr. Ramzi Mahmood), Levi Fuller, Steve Krai, Michael Melady, Tyson Neely, and Rochelle Verspui.

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) Staff: who were present: Christa Beck, Gabriel Berzamina, Janice Chang, Bryan Elder, Jim Fischer, Neal Funston, Valerie Gregory, Joe Karkoski, Sarah Miller, Julie Osborn, Christopher Stevens, Jon Strutzel, and Wes Wilkinson.

Members of the public that were present: Norah Duffy, Director of Certification, California Water Environment Association (CWEA), Steven Garner, Certification Manager, California – Nevada American Water Works Association (CA/NV AWWA), and Alex Rodriguez City of San Jose WWTP employee.

Those who attended by phone were: Advisory Committee Members: Rick Staggs and Tim Lewis (Division Manager of Operations for San Jose-Santa Clara).

Introductions:

- Wes Wilkinson, Staff Services Manager I, was the moderator and welcomed all attendees. Attendees introduced themselves.

Public Comments:

- There were no public comments.

Enforcement Update:

Presented by Bryan Elder, from the Chief Special Investigations Unit (SIU) in the Office of Enforcement (OE).

- Staffing Update:
The OE SIU is currently understaffed. There are two part-time staff dedicated to the OOC (which includes the WWOCP and the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP). The one open position is anticipated to filled by July 2019.
- Case Summary:
Within this fiscal year (7/1/18-present) there are:

- 77 active WWOCP enforcement cases.
- 22 open cases were closed, and 24 new cases opened.
- 4 cases due to reporting/lab fraud.
- 9 cases due to duties and experience.
- 3 letters of reprimand and 3 certifications suspended.
- Most cases are due to operator misconduct. There are a handful of cases due to fraud or falsification.
- Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTP) must have a Chief Plant Operator (CPO) who has the same Grade level or higher than that of the WWTPs classification in order to be in compliance. The list of WWTP's noncompliant WWTPs is getting smaller. This is mainly due to voluntary compliance. There were 19 referrals and 10 noncompliant WWTP cases were closed.

➤ **Ethics Training:**

Two of the suspensions due to examination misconduct required ethics training. There is a consensus of enforcement personnel and of the Advisory Committee that there is a need to increase ethics awareness in the industry.

Question: How does the wastewater industry increase ethical awareness for operators?

Answer: Guidelines for ethics are posted on the WWOCP website, an ethics statement is within the examination instructions and we've increased awareness for whistleblower protections and the importance of verification of wastewater hours for certification purposes by creating a video for employers, a PowerPoint presentation, or a flyer.

Recycled/Advanced Water Treatment Operator (AWTO) Update

Presented by CWEA Director of Certification, Norah Duffy and CA-NV AWWA Certification Manager, Steven Gardner

- Jon Strutzel reported he had nothing new to update from the Advanced Water Treatment Operator (AWTO) Certification Committee since his previous update given at the last Advisory Committee Meeting in December 2018. Jon asked Steven Garner and Norah Duffy to explain to the committee the status of the development of the voluntary AWT Operator Certification Program.

- **Grade III Advanced Water Treatment Plant (AWTO):**
Steven Garner explained that the Grade III examinations have been launched and applications are currently being accepted. The format will be computer based and provide immediate pass or fail results and may be given as early as July 2019. The program has been designed to complement the DWOCP Treatment Grade 3 and WWOCP Grade III examinations and certifications. Applicants must hold a California or Nevada Grade 3 Treatment or WW Grade III at a minimum to apply for the examination.
- **Grade IV and V AWT:**
The examination development has been completed. There will be some specific experience requirements for the Grade IV and V.
- **Training:**
A handbook, reference material and the application is on the [AWT Operator Certification](#) website. A training workshop is scheduled for June 17 – 19, 2019 in West Sacramento, CA, aimed to prepare operators for the duties of an AWT operator. It is not an examination prep course. A manual is anticipated to be published by the Sacramento State University (CSUS), Office of Water Programs (OWP) later in 2019.
- **Renewal:**
Certifications at all grade levels are issued for a three-year period, 24 Continuing education credits with a maximum of 25% in safety and a minimum of 25% in AWT process topics will be required for renewing certificates.
- **Industry Assistance:**
Over 90 people have contributed to the committee for this program. Industry has donated \$200,000 towards the program, which demonstrates the desire from the industry to have this AWT Operator certification. Because of the low number of applicants expected, these donations were crucial to see the program launch.

Examination Update

Presented by Gabriel Berzamina, Examinations Lead Grader.

- Gabriel Berzamina distributed a report labeled “*Wastewater Operator Certification Examination Update - Number of Examinees and Passing Rates from Spring 2013 to Spring 2019*” to all attendees. Passing rates were analyzed using standard deviation. Please see attachment 1.
- Examination results release dates:
Grades I-II were released on May 10, 2019. Grades III-V were released on May 31, 2019.
- Every cycle, engineering staff are recruited for grading the math and essay questions.
- The April 2019 Examination passing rates were discussed:
 - Grade I – The passing rate is 70%, and of the 190 examinees 133 had passing results.
 - Grade II – The passing rate is 66.4%, and out of 220 examinees 146 passed.
 - Grade III -The passing rate is 45.6%, out of 204 examinees 93 had passing results.
 - Grade IV - Passing rate is 25%, and out of 60 examinees 15 passed.
 - Grade V – Passing rate is 45.9%, of the 61 examinees, 28 passed.
- Trends in passing scores:
There is no trend in the fail/pass rates for the different versions of the examinations. There are 5 different versions.
- Question updates:
Questions are tracked and examinations are updated on an as-needed basis. Based on comments from examinees, essay questions sometimes get additional answers added due to new technology. Examination validation was done about ten years ago in an informal process.

Wastewater Op-Cert Mission Statement Subcommittee Update

Presented by Wes Wilkinson, WWOCP Staff Services Manager I

- WWOCP previously formed a workgroup - Mission Statement Subcommittee and put together a draft mission statement.
- No objections or suggested changes were received, so the Mission Statement is complete and will be finalized.

- ***The Mission of the Advisory Committee is to protect Public health and the environment by providing expertise and representation of the Wastewater Treatment Industry to Assist the Wastewater Operator Certification Program in the classification of Wastewater Treatment Plants and certification of operators.***
 - ***Goal 1 – Review all proposed regulations and make recommendations to the State Water Board prior to adoption of any regulations or amendments thereto.***
 - ***Goal 2 – Provide perspective to the State Water Board on topics related to wastewater treatment including, but not limited to, operator certification, plant classification, approved courses, and industry needs.***
 - ***Goal 3 – Facilitate the communication of critical information and trends within the industry, including review of progressive technologies.***
 - ***Goal 4 –Identify equitable solutions towards knowledge-based testing and continuing education.***

Fiscal Impact Report/Update

Presented by Neal Funston, WWOCP Associate Governmental Program Analyst.

- Cash reports for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-2019 are not available due to state-wide implementation delays of the new FISCAL accounting system.
- The numbers were verbally presented based on actual WWOCP receipts received in the office for July 2018 through May 2019; projected receipts for June 2019; and projected WWOCP expenditures for the FY.
- Based on previous internal projections, it appears the WWOCP still is on track to reduce the surplus to a balance of one million dollars by FY 2023 – 2024.

- The WWOCP anticipates having actuals at the December 2019 Advisory Committee meeting.

Wastewater Op-Cert Program Update

Presented by Wes Wilkinson, WWOCP Staff Services Manager I

- **New Advisory Committee Member:**
Wes Wilkinson welcomed Rochelle Verspui as the newest Wastewater Advisory Committee member. Her position is a union representative, “One person who is a member of an organized labor union that represents wastewater treatment plant operators.” The seat previously was held by Lawrence Dimock.
- **Review of the Active Operator’s Report:**
As of May 31, 2019, there are 6,211 active operators of which 11% are Operators-In-Training (OITs), 12% are Grade I’s, 24% are Grade II’s, 29% are Grade III’s, 7% Grade IV’s, and 17% are Grade V’s.
- **Review of the WWOCP’s Age Statistics report:**
There is a trend of an aging workforce, which is referred to as a ‘silver tsunami.’ Over one third of all wastewater operators are 56 years and older (36%). While only 19% of wastewater operators are under 35 years old.
- **CWEA Annual Conference Presentation:**
Wes and Valerie presented an ‘update to the program and exam frequency conversation and comments from operators’ at the Annual CWEA Conference in Palm Springs. About 70 operators attended and approximately two thirds of the attendees were dual-certified or tri-certified operators in Wastewater Treatment, Drinking Water Treatment, and Distribution.
 - Feedback from conference attendees regarding the option of combining exams with the Drinking Water Program and offer the exams three times per year vs. twice a year:
 - Most operators opposed changing the current exam schedule or combining exams. They felt that combining the exams threw the timing off and they wouldn’t get the results

of the current exam with enough time to apply for the next exam if needed.

- Operators prefer that WWOCP place its efforts and attention into the development and implementation of online or computer-based testing. This would enable operators the chance to take exams more frequently and for instantaneous exam results.

OOO Management will reconsider combining the OOO exams as of September 2020.

- Operator Certification Information System (OCIS) database migration: Continue to work with State Water Board's Division of Information Technology to develop and implement a new database that integrates both WWOCP and DWOCP. Operators will have one profile for both programs. Operators eventually will be able to view all information online and upload documents electronically. The timeline for completion and implementation is August 2019.
- Regulation Changes:
Developing a Regulation Package to clean up the current Regulations, including modifying OIT requirements, eliminating provisional operators, and adding continuing education requirements for renewals. A workshop will be scheduled with the Advisory Committee once the draft is completely developed and approved by the State Water Board's OOO management.

Question: Has there been a final decision regarding OITs?

Answer: No. It will be a collaborative effort and the Advisory Committee will be asked for their input as they are representing the industry. A workshop will be scheduled with the Advisory Committee before finalizing the proposed amendments to the regulations. There will be at least a 45-day public comment period. This will be followed by a presentation to the State Water Board. If agreed to, it will be submitted to the Office of Administrative Law for review and implementation.

- Introduction of Assembly Bill (AB)1588:
This bill is in the Legislature, in the Senate. It would authorize the State Water Board to issue a wastewater, water treatment or distribution operator certificates to United States (US) military members with comparable qualifications from experience gained while serving in the

military. It would add an additional Advisory Committee member to the current committee as a member who is an active, or former member of the United States Military with wastewater operations experience.

- New Brochure, "How to Become an Operator:"
New brochure will be available soon that describes the steps to become a WWOCP certified operator. It will be available on the website and upon request.

Question: How often are examinations validated?

Answer: The Wastewater Examination questions is a working document and continuously receive small adjustments based on regulation changes and examinee feedback. Twenty years ago, the examinations were updated and received major changes, however the examinations were validated approximately ten years ago. Some of the smaller changes included adding additional answers to essay questions, and rewording some of the questions.

Schedule Next Advisory Committee Meeting

- The Advisory Committee tentatively chose the date of Wednesday, December 4, 2019 for the next meeting to take place at the Cal/EPA building.