

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – June 2022**

Meeting Date: **Wednesday June 8, 2022**

Attendees: **Advisory Committee Members**

Steve Krai, Kody Tompkins, Ramzi Mahmood, Monte
Hamamoto, Chris Lehman, Josh Viera

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Annette Caraway, Joe Karkoski, Julie Osborn, Neal Funston,
Valerie Gregory, Christine Gordon, Alice Webber, Sarah
Miller, Barry Del Carlo, Phillip Cohen, Alessandra Langen,
Bryan Elder, Jody Hack, German Myers, Jamie Johnson

Public

Nora Duffey, Ben Carver, David Herman, Manny Moreno,
Ryan Smith, Steve Garner, Tim Lewis, Danielle Blacet

Item 1 – Introductions

- Annette Caraway, Operator Certification Program Manager acted as moderator for this meeting. Meeting was held via Video/Teleconference and in person at the CalEPA building. Moderator noted there will not be a quorum of the Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP) Advisory Committee at this meeting due to vacancies on the Committee. No action will be taken by the committee.

Item 2 – Agenda Review

- Moved the Office of Enforcement update up to the top of the agenda so that Bryan Elder could depart meeting early.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- There were not any public comments at the beginning of the meeting. Near end of meeting while scheduling next meeting, Steve Krai asked if there any intention of having advisory meetings in person once again. Annette responded by stating that they intend to have the next meeting in person.

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Item 4 – Stakeholder Engagement and Relationships- Christine Gordon

- The Water Associations, Clean Water Environment Association (CWEA) and California-Nevada Section American Water Works Association (CA-NV AWWA) worked together on the white paper memo touching on some high-level issues with the Office of Operator Certification. On May 10th, AWWA and CWEA presented the issue paper at a State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) meeting with three main points from stakeholder feedback: 1- Processing times for operator examinations/certifications being too long, 2- Stakeholder engagement and relationships, and 3- Operator In Training (OIT) requirements. The associations felt declined relationships between the OOC and the advisory committees, specifically, confrontational with the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) and apathy from the WWOCP.
- Manny stated he recently took and passed a wastewater (WW) operator examination, and the process was smooth and simple; he has no complaints.
- Steve Krai stated he was satisfied with the WW side- it is not confrontational; the operators have been very receptive and appreciate being able to take more than 2 WW operator examinations each year.

Item 5 – Operator In Training (OIT) Requirement

- This topic was included in the white paper memo and included a recommendation to eliminate or replace OITs. Staff in WWOCP are open to ideas while avoiding more risk to the environment with untrained operators.
- Christine Gordon - listed items for discussion: Issues with work experience and work force development, Recommendations for job task analysis, and Eliminating direct supervision, which could directly impact the risk to public health and the environment.
- Steve Krai- Agrees that eliminating OIT would be a mistake and would cause harm to the environment but is open to a possible reduction in required OIT hours from 1 year 1,800 to 4 720. Also noted that there is Lone Operator and Provisional Operator options already. Mentioned that the smaller plants train the OITs, then they leave to work at larger plants.
- Kody Tompkins- does not believe we should get rid of OITs but would agree to lowering the required educational requirements and not require educational points for an OIT. Smaller, more rural plants often pay for a course for an upcoming OIT to be able to apply for the OIT Certification. The company then

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pays the employee while they wait to get the required educational requirement for the certificate, which is 6 points.. This is an issue because they cannot work in the capacity that they are hired for. Then the OIT takes a job at a larger facility. Tim Lewis- To get an OIT through the OIT program at his plant, it does take about a year. Agrees that the 6 educational points have been a problem since the COVID pandemic. Concerned that eliminating the 1800 hours of experience required for certification would become an issue. Suggested that more outreach, such as seminars and information booths at trade shows could give people more information about the program.

- Josh Viera- Has not been able to fill an open OIT position due to educational requirements. They are applying without the understanding that there is a 6-education point requirement. Taking away the required 6 educational points would help. If we want more operators, we should let them pay the fees and begin to gain work experience.
- Steve Krai- We bring in student interns and they cannot get the hours counted towards their OIT certificate as they do not qualify for the OIT Certificate yet.
- Manny- Maybe a compromise for smaller facilities?
- Nora- Welcomed anyone on the call to join the workgroup being formed – Kody Tompkins, Josh Viera, Manny all expressed interest.
- Nora Duffy- (510) 382-7800 ext. 106 or nduffy@cwea.org
- Julie Osborn stated that there is Open Meeting Act requirements that the Advisory Committee members must follow- telling what members can and can't do in open meetings.

Item 6 – Updates

- Office of Enforcement (OE)
 - Bryan Elder- OE has made a lot of progress in reducing the backlog of complaints. Backlog had close to 100 cases.
 - About 20 cases have been closed that have resulted in several actions including 2 reprimands to operators, 2 Notice of Violations to the wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), 1 revoked license due to misconduct at San Francisco Public Utility Commission, many cases were referred to Regional Boards for lack of permitting and permit compliance. One WW operator certification case is pending from backlog.

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- Office of Operator Certification
 - Neal Funston - Introduced the WWOCP team
 - Examinations
 - Neal Funston – the Prometric contract is in the renewal process phase. WW operator examination passing rates were provided (see handout). Grade III and V WW operator examination passing rates have increased. Currently there is a 2 -3 week turnaround time for examination application processing.

Item 7 – Appointment of New WWOCP Advisory Committee Members

- Neal Funston - There are still 5 vacancies to fill in July on the WWOCP Advisory Committee. A Lyris List email notification will be sent out to identify specific roles available. Five nominees are moving forward for the State Water Board's Executive Director approval. For any questions or nominations, contact Neal Funston.

Item 8 - Schedule Next Advisory Committee Meeting:

- The next WW Advisory Committee meeting will be held on December 7, 2022, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM possibly in person.