

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP) Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – November 24, 2025**

Meeting Date: **Monday, November 24, 2025**

Attendees: **Advisory Committee Members**

Scott Lening, Steve Krai, Josh Vieira, Tracy Crane, Kody Tompkins, Louis Sun, Akram Botrous, Hailie Hix, Christopher Lehman, Ben Carver

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Joshua Ziese, Helen Wuellner, Keisha Kelley, Julie Osborn, Valerie Gregory, Jon Hermison, Antonio Aguilar, Erin Garner,

Public

Gina Dorrington, Sue Mosburg

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

- Steven Garner with California-Nevada Section of the American Water Works Association, provided an update on the number of Advanced Water Treatment Operator Certifications.
 - Grade 3: 214
 - Grade 4: 56
 - Grade 5: 53

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Item 4 – Regulatory Updates – Proposed Regulation Changes

• Proposed amendments to the definitions include:

- Amend the definitions of “associate’s degree” and “bachelor’s degree” to delete references to accrediting entities that no longer exist and add new accrediting entities, as appropriate.

This change would update the existing definitions to reflect current accrediting entities and would not affect current and previously accepted education.

- Replace the definition of “full time” with a definition of “one year of qualifying experience” that would apply to all operators, whether they work full time or part time.

This change would not affect how qualifying experience is calculated. It is intended to clarify the existing definition and align the regulations with how qualifying experience currently is calculated.

- Add a definition of “high school diploma” that reflects high school diplomas shall be from an accredited high school, consistent with current procedures.
- Amend the definition of “science course” to include those courses that currently qualify as “wastewater treatment courses” and delete the separate definition and use of the term “wastewater treatment course” throughout the regulations.

This change is for simplification purposes and would not affect the way courses are counted.

• Proposed amendments regarding Chief Plant Operators (CPOs) include:

- Considering requirements to ensure CPOs can perform the duties of CPO effectively, such as:
 - Adding minimum experience requirements for CPOs.
 - Limitations on how many wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) one individual can be CPO over.
 - Limitations on how far away a CPO may live from a WWTP for which the individual is the CPO to ensure they can reach the plant promptly when necessary.

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- There are concerns regarding the ability of CPOs to effectively perform their duties under certain conditions, such as those below:
 - A Grade I operator assuming the role of CPO for a Class I WWTP immediately after obtaining certification as a Grade I operator. In some instances, this may transpire after the operator served as an operator-in-training (OIT) at the facility with limited direct supervision of the previous CPO.
 - An individual being CPO over several WWTPs, which calls into question whether the individual is able to effectively perform all the duties of a CPO at each of the WWTPs.
 - An individual living so far away from a WWTP that it is questionable whether the individual ever is physically present at the WWTP.
 - Concerns that individual CPOs who are CPOs of multiple facilities or who live a significant distance from a WWTP may not be able to be physically present at the WWTP within a reasonable amount of time in an emergency or when otherwise needed due to a critical situation.

Feedback from Advisory Committee Members – CPOs

The Advisory Committee Members discussed minimum qualifications for CPOs, stating that WWTPs internal requirements generally address most of the concerns and imposing additional restrictions could create hiring challenges, particularly for rural and lower-grade facilities. Some agencies require proximity to facilities for emergency response reasons, whereas some CPOs may oversee WWTPs from greater distances when adequate Designated Operator-In-Charge (DOIC) coverage exists.

Advisory Committee Members raised questions about whether the State Water Board considers CPO response methods such as virtual or phone-based problem-solving as sufficient alternatives to physical presence at the WWTP and the role of a DOIC in addressing issues when they arise. The Advisory Committee Members also inquired if any studies or surveys had been done on the effects of CPO travel distance to the WWTP they oversee.

Advisory Committee Members acknowledged that requirements vary by facility. Suggestions included clarifying the responsibilities of Contract Operators and CPOs managing multiple plants. There was interest expressed in exploring minimum requirements for CPOs, such as work experience requirements that may not be substituted with education and possible limits on the distance a CPO may live from the

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system(s) they oversee. However, such requirements may complicate CPO recruitment at Grade I plants and increase rural hiring challenges.

- **Proposed amendments for the Lone Operator requirements include:**
 - Considering amendments to ensure that Lone Operators are not used as a long-term solution in place of hiring the appropriate grade operator(s) or a Contract Operator, including:
 - Limiting renewals
 - Amendments to the requirements to be approved to use a Lone Operator
 - Use of a Lone Operator was intended to be a temporary solution in situations where a WWTP owner has had difficulty, despite due diligence, hiring a certified operator of the appropriate grade to operate the WWTP. Current regulations specify that approvals for use of a Lone Operator are valid for 180 days, however, current regulations do not set a limit on the number of times this approval may be renewed. There is a concern that some WWTP's are utilizing Lone Operator's inappropriately as a long-term solution to hiring a certified operator of the appropriate grade to operate the WWTP.

Feedback from Advisory Committee Members – Lone Operator

The Advisory Committee Members discussed strategies to address issues with the use of Lone Operators. Advisory Committee Members recommended requiring that applications for use of a Lone Operator include an explanation of the WWTPs staffing issues, the actions taken over the previous six months to resolve the staffing issues, and a plan for the next six months outlining how the WWTP intends to resolve the staffing issues, with similar requirements for renewal. Limiting renewals to a one-time renewal and requiring a renewal fee was suggested to encourage timely hiring, as a year is adequate time for facilities to fill vacancies.

Additional recommendations include shortening the waiting period for certification exams, which is a regulatory change already being considered, and potentially extending Lone Operator approvals to a full year.

- **Proposed amendments for the Operator-In-Training (OIT) Certification requirements:**
 - Delete the requirement for obtaining 6 education points prior to being certified as an OIT.
 - This is a Sub-workgroup recommendation approved by the Advisory Committee and the OOC.

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- Amend the amount of time an OIT certificate is valid, from 24 months to 36 months to align with Grades I-V certificates.
- **Proposed amendments for Operator Certification requirements include:**
 - Considering adding a maximum number of years of qualifying experience credit that may be substituted with educational points to ensure operators have adequate experience performing operations for higher grade levels.
 - This change no longer is being considered. Section 3684(3) in the Wastewater Regulations already specifies the maximum substitution permitted.
 - Amend the certification requirements to reflect that operators may downgrade a valid certificate to a lower grade level for clarity.
- **Proposed amendments for the Examination requirements include:**
 - Amend language to be consistent with the change from paper exams to Computer Based Testing, including:
 - Deleting language regarding final filing dates (will eliminate the 60-day waiting period);
 - Amend the deadline for resolving application deficiencies, which currently is tied to the next filing date; and
 - Making conforming changes to examination security.
- **Proposed amendments for the Operator Certificate Renewal requirements include:**
 - Prohibit renewal applications from being submitted more than 180 days prior to expiration of a certificate.
 - This would align the regulations with current practice and ensure consistency with the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program.
- **Proposed amendments for the Disciplinary Action section include:**
 - Add downgrade of a certificate to the list of possible disciplinary actions.
 - Delete the special retention policy for notices to the State Water Board of discipline action taken by WWTP owners and Contract Operators against operators, OITs, Provisional Operators, and Contract Operators, to align with the retention period for all other records.
- **Other minor additional proposed changes include:**
 - Update “California Department of Public Health” references.
 - Incorporate statutory amendments to the Advisory Committee positions.
 - This would update the regulations to reflect positions added by statute since the last regulatory updates.

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- Delete obsolete references and provisions, including section 3680.1, which provided time for privately owned WWTPs to comply with the Operator Certification Regulations.
- Considering amending deadlines for resolving deficiencies on applications throughout the regulations for consistency across the programs.
 - Current regulations are silent on a deadline for exam applications and certification applications have a very short time period (60 days).

Item 5 – Next Advisory Committee Meeting

- The OOC will reach out via email no later than February to begin scheduling the next meeting for the Spring.