

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP) Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – April 30, 2024**

Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 30, 2024

Attendees: Advisory Committee Members

Louis Sun, Steve Krai, Benjamin Carver, Josh Vieira, Ramzi Mahmood

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Christine Gordon, Keisha Kelley, Julie Osborn, Valerie Gregory, Tomas Eggers, Daniel Freed, Jon Hermison, Sarah Miller, Sahand Rastegarpour

Public

None

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 (CalEPA) building located at 1001 I Street, Sacramento, California 95814.

Item 2 – Agenda Review

- Keisha Kelley reviewed the agenda, there were no comments and the agenda proceeded as scheduled with a reminder that the meeting is being recorded.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- There were no public comments.

Item 4 – Office of Enforcement (OE) Update

- Tomas Eggers of the Office of Enforcement (OE), Special Investigations Unit, presented updates on Wastewater Operator Certification (WWOC) matters.
 - Case Updates: Within the last year, there are currently five new cases opened and six cases closed. Three cases have been resolved with action including a staff enforcement letter, a notice of violation and a suspension; the other three cases were closed without action.

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- A reminder that systems have a duty to report operator disciplinary actions that are taken. There have been issues with systems keeping track of operator hours and the status of certifications.

Item 5 – Fee Changes

- Christine Gordon discussed the recent history of fee change discussions amongst the committee members. WWOCP operator fees were previously reduced in 2017, when at the same time it was decided to decrease prudent fund reserve. The previous joint committee meeting with the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) in July 2022 also provided an update from the Fee Review Branch. Previous fluctuations in staff and revenue created WWOCP cost savings and fee increases were not warranted at that time. A review of the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget has warranted discussion around fee changes due to approaching the prudent fund reserve. Fee changes will be presented to the State Water Board in June or July 2024.
 - There will be an additional Wastewater Advisory Committee Meeting to discuss the proposed fee structure in May or June 2024 with no other topics on the agenda.

Item 6 – Program Updates

- Keisha Kelley provided the following updates:
 - Staffing Update
 - The OOC program currently has two vacancies:
 - First level manager over Unit 2 - interviews have been completed and hope to have it filled in May 2024.
 - Certification analyst position in Unit 2 – will be posting for recruitment in May 2024.
 - Program statistics (reference documents displayed on screen).
 - Certifications – number of certificate holders by grade and type as of December 2023.
 - Examinations – pass/fail statistics for July 2023 – December 2023.
 - Wastewater Exam Statistics – comparing paper and pencil exam pass and fail rates to Computer-Based Testing (CBT) pass and fail rates. There were no exams completed in 2020 and computer-based testing began February 20, 2021.
 - Factors to consider with CBT testing data.
 - Paper and pencil exams had 5 versions of the exam.
 - CBT offers 3 versions of the exam.
 - There is no partial credit given for math or essay questions on CBT exams; individual questions are either correct or incorrect, and the exam is scored.

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- Examinees can take exams up to 6 times per year with CBT versus twice per year with paper and pencil exams.
 - Processing times have been within the 30-day regulatory requirement. This is the result of the reorganization of the program and reducing the high vacancy rates.
 - Discussion regarding calculators and formula equivalent sheets available only on the computer may be a barrier for some. There was a recommendation of a list of approved calculators for exams at testing sites. This may be a possibility to be negotiated with the next CBT contract. However, it was mentioned that this increases the possibility of cheating.
 - The current process for certifying inmates was discussed.
- Online application portal
 - WWOCP staff have been diligently working with State Water Board Division of Information Technology (DIT) staff to address unanticipated bugs since the launch of phase 1 in September 2023.
 - The go-live date for the higher grade level of examination applications is projected to be late summer or early fall 2024.
 - After electronic submittals for all grade levels of examination applications are available on the portal, WWOCP intends for the next phase of the portal to implement electronic submission of renewal applications.
- Operator certification customer service survey
 - Semiannual customer service survey results were provided to Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in March 2024.
 - The survey results cover the 6-month period from September 2023 – February 2024.
 - There were 18 respondents total for this survey period and the weighted average score for overall experience with the OOC program was 3.6 out of 5.
 - Respondents are not required to provide a response to every question; they may skip questions, are given the option to provide additional comments or suggestions to improve the program, and are given the option to provide their contact information. Respondents that provide contact information are typically contacted by OOC staff to address and resolve issues, if applicable.
 - Survey results covering the 6-month period from March 2024 – August 2024 will be provided to Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in September 2024.

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- Vacant Advisory Committee Positions
 - Currently Seeking nominations to fill three currently open positions and one position that will become open on June 30, 2024.
 - Two open positions are for representatives from statewide organizations.
 - One open position is for a representative from an organized labor union to represent WWTP operators.
 - The position opening on June 30, 2024 is for a military representative.
 - Email notice seeking nominations went out at the end of March 2024 to our wastewater operator and tribal email subscription lists.
 - This information was posted on the WWOCP website as well.
 - Nominations must be submitted by 4 P.M. on May 15, 2024.
- Examination Validation
 - WWOCP is currently in the early stages of beginning the exam validation process.
 - The sub-workgroup includes the program engineer Sahand Rastegarpour, examination analyst Sarah Miller, and Advisory Committee members Ben Carver, Louis Sun, Josh Vieira, and Ramzi Mahmood.
 - The kick-off meeting was held on March 22, 2024 and reoccurring meetings have been scheduled every two weeks beginning in May 2024.
- Sub-workgroup recommendations and regulation scoping
 - Recurring internal meetings to conduct regulation scoping will begin shortly. An internal meeting with the OOC staff to begin developing an outline is scheduled for May 7, 2024. The Advisory Committee will be informed of all proposed changes once they have been identified.
 - The following items have been identified thus far as changes to include in a regulation package:
 - Sub-workgroup recommendation: Change the education requirement so that the six (6) educational points can be earned after the Operator In Training (OIT) certificate is obtained but before the certificate's expiration date. This would allow the OIT three (3) years to earn the educational points and experience hours concurrently.
 - Remove requirements related to pencil and paper examination processes that are no longer applicable, including:
 - 60-day waiting period
 - Final filing dates

Item 6 – Meeting Recap

- Keisha Kelley thanked the Advisory Committee members who attended in person. She advised that the OOC will reach out via email for the upcoming fees

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meeting and again in August 2024 regarding the Fall 2024 Advisory Committee Meeting which may take place in October 2024.