

Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP)
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes December 5, 2018

Present: Advisory Committee Members: Jeff Carson, Steve Krai, Chander Letulle, Dr. Ramzi Mahmood, Michael Melady, and Josh Vieira

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) Staff: Christa Beck, Gabriel Berzamina, Annette Caraway, Jim Fischer, Neal Funston, Valerie Gregory, Darrell Jennings II, Angie Noorda, Julie Osborn, Char'Mane Robinson, Christopher Stevens, Jon Strutzel, Alice Webber, and Wes Wilkinson

Public: Certification Manager for California – Nevada American Water Works Association (CA/NV AWWA) Steven Garner, Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) employee Lawrence Grant, Competency Training Systems: Jim Mcpherson, and City of San Jose WWTP employee Alex Rodriguez

By Phone Advisory Committee Members: Lawrence Dimock, Levi Fuller, and Tyson Neely
State Water Board Staff: Wennilyn Fua

Introductions:

- Annette Caraway, Staff Services Manager II, was the moderator and welcomed all attendees. Attendees introduced themselves.

- Lawrence Dimock announced his retirement would be effective December 20, 2108. He joined the meeting by phone and will receive a certificate of appreciation for his service as a WWOCP and Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) Advisory Committee member.

Public Comments:

- There were no public comments.

Enforcement Update:

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

- There are 60 open WWOCP enforcement cases. In 2018, 10 open cases were closed, and 19 new cases opened.

- The DWOCP has 23 open cases. In 2018, 5 cases were closed, and 8 new cases were opened.
- In 2018, 4 proposed Disciplinary Action letters were sent to DWOCP and WWOCP examinees due to examination dishonest conduct.
- The OE can suspend a current certificate (WWOCP and/or DWOCP). Other possible enforcement actions are:
 - Completion of an ethics training course;
 - Informing the operators employer of the dishonest conduct;
 - Placing the operator under probation;
 - Declining to grade the examination;
 - Disallowing the applicant to take the next available exam; and disallow refund for the examination fee.

Question: How long is a typical suspension for exam violations?

Answer: One month.

- Complaint topics include:
 - Operators who have inadequate record keeping; and
 - Examinees who engage in dishonest conduct, and poor operator care and judgment.
- Complaint topics specific to WWOCP include:
 - Operators-In-Training (OIT), not working the required number of wastewater operational hours;
 - Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTP) that do not have a Chief Plant Operator (CPO); and
 - WWTP's that has a CPO Grade level that is lower than the WWTP's classification.
- The OE played segments of a training video it developed to inform site inspectors on what kind of things to look for when doing a site inspection. The OE requested volunteers from the Committee to provide feedback.

Recycled Water Program Update

Presented by Jon Strutzel and Steven Garner.

- Jon Strutzel reported that the CA/NV AWWA and the California Water Environment Association (CWEA) are moving forward with an Advanced Water Treatment Program (AWTP) exam and certification program.
- Assembly Bill 574 requires the State Water Board adopt water recycling criteria for Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) through raw water augmentation by December 31, 2023.

- “Raw water augmentation,” is the placement of recycled water into a system of pipelines or aqueducts that deliver raw water to a drinking water treatment plant that provides water to a public water system.

Question: Is there a reason that the State does not have an AWTP Certified operator program in development?

Answer: The State Water Board cannot require or create programs until the regulations are in place. The regulations would give the State Water Board the authority to create the program.

- Jon Strutzel invited Steven Garner, Certification Manager for CA/NV AWWA to the meeting and speak regarding the recent AWTP developments.
- CA/NV AWWA has a memo of agreement with CWEA to develop the AWTP examination and certification program. A guiding committee was created and has roughly 90 members.
- During the discussion it was mentioned that there are not many questions regarding treatment processes used in advanced water treatment plants on the DWOCP Treatment and the WWOCP examinations.
- There will be three AWTP grades offered, starting at Grade 3.
- The Grade 3 AWTP examination is not complete, but it is expected to be ready by Spring 2019. AWT Grades 4 and 5 have not been developed.
- Exam questions were based on information provided by subject matter experts. Consultants looked at standard operating procedures (SOPs) for existing water recycling plants. Then they completed job analyses by looking what operators need to know and what kind of things will they encounter on the job. Additionally, subject matter experts were interviewed to determine what information and topics the examination should cover.
- There is some training currently available. Some organizations and manufactures do offer AWTP training. Water Research Foundation has several well-developed Direct Potable Reuse slides designed for a classroom setting.
- All CA/NV AWWA/CWEA developed examinations will be voluntary. It is anticipated that the certificate may be valid for two years and may require continuing education units to qualify for renewal.
- There are currently 7 to 8 Advanced Water Treatment Recycling Plants in California.

- The examination may be computerized and offered at professional testing sites as “on demand,” similar to CWEA current examinations.
- These items are to be discussed in the upcoming AWTP committee meeting in San Diego, CA on December 10, 2018.

Exam Update

Presented by Gabriel Berzamina the Lead Grader.

- Gabriel Berzamina distributed a report labeled “*Wastewater Operator Certification Examination Update - Number of Examinees and Passing Rates from Spring 2013 to Fall 2018*” to all attendees. Please see handout A.
- The October 2018 Exam and the historical average passing rates were discussed:
 - Grade I - Lowest number of examinees taking the exam;
 - Grade II - Highest number of examinees on record;
 - Grade III -Average number of attendees with an average passing rate of 56.8 percent;
 - Grade IV - Passing rate for this cycle was historically low; and
 - Grade V - Highest numbers of examinees with a 65.8 percent passing rate. The passing rate was better than the previous two cycles.

Question: Was data collected for passing rates for re-examinees?

Answer: Data has not previously been collected; however, with the utilization of the new Scantron Grading Machine the State Water Board may provide this information in the future.

- It was noted that the exam version the State Water Board is using is confidential and is not disclosed for the integrity of the exams. There is a random scramble of which exam is used for each cycle.
- The WWOCP is looking at the possibility of online testing. This would make the predictability even lower. It would make thousands of versions, instead of just five, from the random choosing of the different questions.
- It has been concluded for the most part, that passing rates decrease the more times operators take the exam. Most of the time people generally reach a peak of knowledge and do not go further. If an individual is going to pass, the individual most likely will pass the first, second, or third time. Usually individuals who take the exam five or more times do not pass.

Fiscal Impact Report/Update

Presented by Wes Wilkinson, WWOCP Staff Services Manager I.

- Wes Wilkinson referred to the handout “*Financial Impact Progress Report due to Emergency Regulation Fee Reduction*,” showing the effects of the emergency regulations that reduced the WWOCP’s fees. Please see handout B.
- Renewals were reduced to \$150/\$110 for all grades. The lower rate is for operators certified in both Wastewater and Drinking Water.
- Certificate fees were reduced 25 percent.
- In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-2018, the WWCOP collected \$1,051,207 in fees and expenditures were \$1,024,028. The account was at \$3,163,806 for the close of fiscal year 2017/2018, which is \$117,810 over the amount that was projected before the fee change.
- The WWOCP expects the account to reach the target surplus with \$1,000,000 remaining in the account between FY’s 22/23 and 23/24.
- There will be a Fiscal Impact Report and Update presented at every Advisory Committee Meeting.

Wastewater Op-Cert Program Update

Presented by Wes Wilkinson

- Wes reviewed the handout labeled “*Active Operator Certificates*.” Please see handout C.
- The October 13, 2018 WWOCP examination cycle is now complete. All examinations have been graded. Please see handout number six.
 - Grades I and II exam results were released on November 15, 2018.
 - Grades III-V exam results were released on November 30, 2018.
 - Starting this exam cycle the WWOCP no longer will conduct exam reviews.

Question: What has been the reaction to eliminate the exam review?

Answer: The WWOCP has just started to receive calls from operators, including one upset examinee. Please note, the examinees that fail the exam receive a breakdown on the results letter. When the WWOCP

starts utilizing the new scantron grading machine, we may be able to provide more detailed information to examinees.

- WWOCP Staffing updates:
 - Debbie Zuccala, former Certification Analyst, retired at the end of August 2018. The WWOCP is in the process of selecting the Staff Services Analyst (SSA), replacement.
 - Jaime Marotte, former Exam Analyst, transferred to the DWOCP at the end of September 2018. The open Associate Governmental Program Analyst (AGPA) position was filled by Valerie Gregory who previously worked for the WWOCP as the Exam Analyst from 2008-2012.
 - Sarah Miller started in October 2018 as the new Seasonal Clerk.
- Steve Krai is the new Advisory Committee Member representing professional engineers specializing in sanitary engineering. The position previously was held by Victoria Conway.
- Due to Lawrence Dimock's retirement, there will be a vacancy on the Advisory Committee for a person who is a member of an organized labor union that represents WWTP operators. The new member will complete the term ending June 30, 2020.
- The WWOCP will start recruiting for the position in January 2019 by sending a Lyris Blast (electronic email) announcement requesting a resume, and statement of qualifications to be submitted by the deadline of February 15, 2019.
- The WWOCP will gather and submit all nominations to the Deputy Director of Financial Assistance, Leslie Laudon. The State Water Board's Executive Director, Eileen Sobeck will make the selection.
- Once the member has been selected, the WWOCP will issue a Lyris Blast to operators, an email to the Advisory Committee members, and the information will be listed on the WWOCP website.
- The WWOCP will continue to work and assist with the Division of Information Technology (DIT) and the DWOCP in the development of a new database that would integrate both programs operator information. The implementation date is anticipated to be June 2019.

Question: Will the new database change the public interface?

Answer: No, not for wastewater operators.

- The State Water Board requested that Advisory Members submit database development suggestions by February 1, 2019.

- The WWOCP is continuing to work on developing a Regulation Package to update the current Regulations due to changes in the past couple of years, including the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 2890.
- The WWOCP future outreach will include:
 - A presentation at the CWEA annual conference on April 11, 2019;
 - Publishing an informational brochure on Contract Operators; and
 - Creating a brochure on 'how to' become a WWOCP operator.
- Advisory Committee members provided input about existing informational documents from CWEA and Sacramento State University, Office of Water Programs on how to become a WWTP Operator.
- Starting with the October 13, 2018, the equivalency sheets were no longer printed and stapled to the exams.
- Each examinee was provided a laminated current version of formulae sheet and each test site was provided a smaller number of laminated proposed formulae sheets (for 25 percent of examinees at each exam site).
- This change increases exam security as some operators attempt to remove the printed formulae sheets out of the exam room. It allows the WWOCP to use multiple three staple format on the exam and instruct examinees not to un-staple their exam sheets. The DWOCP also uses laminated formulae sheets and does not allow examinees to detach the exams.

Question: Is there an established timeline for the WWOCP to decide which formulae sheet to use for future exams (current or proposed)?

Answer: The WWOCP will continue to revisit the issue.

- Over the last couple of years, the WWOCP and the DWOCP Advisory Committees have been discussing increasing services, and in particular increasing exam opportunities.
- The Exam Combination proposal is to provide three exams per year in January, May (for Wastewater Grades I and II only), and September for Drinking Water Treatment, Distribution, and Wastewater examinees.
- The WWOCP examination time currently allowed for Grades I and II would increase from 2 ½ hours to 3 hours to align with DWOCP examination times to minimize interruptions. The number of exam questions would increase for Grade I from 80 to 100 and Grade II from 90 to 100.
- The WWOCP would no longer allow partial credit for math questions for Grades I and II in order to decrease the grading time.

- An operator could only take one exam per exam date. If an operator only is pursuing one certification, an additional exam opportunity is available, however, if an operator is pursuing multiple certifications, there will be less exam opportunities per year. Currently, there are six OOC exam opportunities per calendar year (two Drinking Water Treatment, two Distribution, and two Wastewater exams). With this proposal, there would only be three exam opportunities per year for dual operators.
- The DWOCP Advisory Committee met on November 1, 2018 and discussed increasing exam opportunities. Their discussion about dual operators (Drinking Water Treatment, Distribution, and Wastewater) concluded that combining the exams three times a year would decrease the exam opportunities. Advisory Committee members asked for the opportunity to discuss this change with operators at the CA/NV AWWA Conference March of 2019. Based on the meeting, the OOC decided to change its exam frequency change implementation date to September 2020 (from September 2019).
- The WWOCP will request feedback at the 2019 CWEA Annual Conference and the DWOCP will get feedback while presenting at the CA/NV AWWA Annual Conference.

Question: How many WWOCP operators are dual operators?

Answer: Out of approximately 6,000 operators around 1,300 have both a Wastewater certificate and a Drinking Water Treatment and/or Distribution certificate.

- The trend of the industry is for operators to obtain dual certification.
- The Advisory Committee will discuss the exam change at the next meeting in June 2019.
- At the previous Advisory Committee Meeting (June 6, 2018) there was discussion to add ethics questions to the WWOCP exam.
- The WWOCP decided to table this issue as it would require a regulation change, and therefore, did not form a sub-committee to discuss the issue.

Wastewater Op-Cert Mission Statement Subcommittee Update

Presented by Wes Wilkinson

Participants in the Subcommittee are: Michael Melady, Tyson Neely, Jeff Carson, Wes Wilkinson, Gabriel Berzamina, and Christa Beck.

- There have been two conference calls and multiple email communications.

- The Advisory Committee agreed to table this topic so that the Subcommittee could meet one additional time to finish the Mission Statement before presenting it to the Advisory Committee.

Operator-In-Training (OIT) Subcommittee Update

Presented by Annette Caraway, OOC Staff Services Manager II

Participants in the Subcommittee are: Lawrence Dimock, Larry Gant, Chander Letulle, and Tyson Neely, with Annette Caraway as the Facilitator.

- There have been two conference calls and multiple email communications.
- Please see handout D for the discussion points.
- One minute was given to each participant to express their views on the Operators-In-Training (OIT) certification requirement.
- One participant stated that it is the CPO's responsibility and the State Water Board's responsibility to oversee a wastewater plant properly. The OIT provides little value.
- Another participant stated that the OIT program does work. It works well for inmates. However, many cannot hire OITs due to lack of supervisors. He is in favor of aligning the program with the Water Treatment Operator Certification program for Grades I and II.
- Another participant stated that the majority of students shy away from wastewater courses because of OIT requirements. Aligning the programs has a lot of value for new people coming into the programs.
- One participant stated that removing the time requirements of an OIT for Grade II or higher is a mistake. Grade II Operators need a requirement for experience. Maybe Grade I should be the entry level and remove current OIT requirements.
- Annette Caraway requested that the group should look at the proposed changes and email if there are any different options not already listed that should be considered by December 31, 2018.
- A participant stated that the current requirement of 1,800 hours of experience gained as an OIT is important. He also suggested of changing the requirement to requiring two classes, one math and one science, so that both areas are covered. Annette Caraway requested this suggestion be put in writing and sent in an email by December 31, 2018.

Wastewater Collections Certification Discussion

Presented by James McPherson from the Competency Training Systems (CTS).

- James (Jim) McPherson asked the Wastewater Advisory Committee if there is a need for the State of California to administer a Wastewater Collections Certificate program?
- Please see handout E for the discussion points.
- The wastewater collections certificate program currently is being administered by CWEA and James McPherson presented his arguments as why a State program would work better.
- The CWEA certificate is voluntary and not mandatory.
- Meeting participants raised the following issue, there are significant legal and economic ramifications if collection systems are not operated correctly, such as sewer overflows.
- It was discussed that some of James McPherson's concerns could be addressed by the hiring agency, such as proper training of the collection workers.
- It was argued that the California Occupational Safety and Health Regulations (Cal/OSHA) Title 8 training varies greatly between agencies and the CWEA Collections Certificate program is not able to solve this problem.
- It was argued that the CWEA Collections does its due diligence.
- It was stated that statutes would have to be changed/amended to give the State authority to have the program.
- There was much discussion on this issue.
- The consensus of the WWOCP Advisory Committee is that it is worth looking at.

Schedule Next Advisory Committee Meeting

- The Advisory Committee tentatively chose the date of Wednesday, June 5, 2019 for the next meeting to take place at the Cal/EPA building.