

**Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (DWOCP) Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – April 17, 2025**

Meeting Date: Thursday, April 17, 2025

Attendees: Advisory Committee Members

Jose J. Martinez, Chris Castaing, Jose Martinez, Doug Culbert, Mike Maestas, Derek Nguyen, Ian Tillery

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Valerie Gregory, Julie Osborn, Josh Ziese, Helen Wuellner, Keisha Kelley, Antonio Aguilar, Sarah Miller, Tomas Eggers, Stefan Cajina, Randy Barnard

Public

Sue Mosburg, Chris Molina, Steven Molina

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, there were no comments, and the agenda proceeded as scheduled. Attendees were informed that the meeting was being recorded for note-taking purposes only and would be deleted after meeting minutes were prepared. Advisory Committee members participating remotely were reminded that they must appear on-camera and must announce if they encounter technical issues that necessitate turning off their camera.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- Steve Molina, Yucaipa Water District, made a comment and suggestion regarding awarding experience credit for recycled water experience.
- Dan Armendariz, California Water System, made a comment regarding longer turnaround times for Drinking Water renewals.

Item 4 – Office of Enforcement (OE) Updates

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- Tomas Eggers, OE, Special Investigations unit, provided the following updates on DWOCP enforcement matters for June 2024 to present:
 - 5 open cases
 - 14 cases closed
 - 4 with disciplinary action
 - 2 of the 4 disciplinary actions taken were revoked certifications.

Item 5 – DWOCP Updates

- Keisha Kelley provided the following updates:
 - Staffing Update
 - In the Fall, the OOC had 3 vacancies:
 - 1 vacant Drinking Water Certification Analyst in Unit 2 (filled in March 2025)
 - 1 vacant clerical support position in Unit 2
 - 2 vacant clerical support positions in Unit 1
 - Clerical support staff were instrumental in clearing a backlog of filing and file room maintenance tasks. With many of those tasks now addressed, it is not necessary to fill those vacancies. The current filing and file room workload is adequately supported by the existing clerical support staff.
 - Processing times have remained consistently within the DWOCP's 45-day time frame policy.
 - Program statistics (Attachment A)
 - Comparison of applications received, and the number of certifications issued by discipline for the same 6-month period in 2023 and 2024 (Attachment A page 1)
 - Certifications – number of valid certificates by discipline and grade for each month from July – December 2024.
 - Examinations – (Attachment A page 2 and 3)
 - Pass/fail statistics by discipline and grade for the same 6-month period in 2023 and 2024.
 - Cumulative computer-based testing (CBT) pass/fail statistics by discipline and grade.
 - Pass/fail statistics for the T5 exam for the same period in 2023 and 2024 (fall exam)
 - Age report (Attachment A page 4 and 5)
 - Number of valid certificates by discipline, grade, and operator age.

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- Online Application Portal
 - The OOC, in coordination with the State Water Board's Division of Information Technology, has continued development of an interactive online application portal to allow applicants the ability to submit applications electronically, review and resolve application deficiencies and track application status.
 - In September 2023, phase 1 of the portal was launched allowing applicants to submit applications for grades 1 and 2 examinations electronically for both the DWOCP and Wastewater Operator Certification Program.
 - In October 2024, electronic grade 3 examination applications were launched.
 - In December 2024, grade 4 examination applications were launched.
 - In February 2025, grade 5 examination applications were launched.
 - The OOC has begun working with the State Water Board's Division of Information Technology on the development of electronic renewal applications. The OOC anticipates the launch of electronic wastewater renewal applications in 2025 and the launch of electronic drinking water renewal applications in 2026. Drinking water renewals have a continuing education requirement and development of the electronic renewal application is more complex than wastewater renewal applications.
 - Development of electronic certification applications will begin following the completion of the renewal application phase.
- Operator Certification Customer Service Survey
 - The semi-annual customer service survey results were provided to the Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in March of this calendar year.
 - The survey results cover the 6-month period of September 2024 through February 2025.
 - There were 18 respondents total for this survey period and the weighted average for overall experience with the OOC was 3.7 out of 5.
 - Respondents are not required to provide a response to every question, they may skip questions and are given the opportunity to provide additional comments or suggestions to improve the program and leave their contact information. Respondents that leave contact information are contacted by the OOC to address and resolve any issues, if applicable.
 - Survey results covering the 6-month period of March 2025 through August 2025 will be provided to the Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in September 2025.

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- Regulation Scoping
 - In May 2024, the OOC began conducting frequent meetings to initiate scoping regulatory updates necessary for each program.
 - The OOC has completed the initial outlines which are undergoing internal review.
 - The sub work group recommendation to modify the drinking water experience requirement to include experience at advanced water treatment facilities for certified drinking water treatment operators has been included in regulation scoping.
 - The OOC will reach out to Advisory Committee members to schedule a meeting to present the outline as soon as it has made it through internal review.
- Conversion Sheet Update
 - As a result of the discussion that took place at the Fall 2024 Advisory Committee meeting regarding updating the formula conversion sheet, a small sub work group was formed to complete a review and make updates to the formula conversion sheet. The sub work group was comprised of Advisory Committee members and DWOCP staff.
 - Advisory Committee member Mike Maestas presented the changes:
 - Updated definitions to include definitions for all the acronyms included in the conversion sheet
 - Standardized and cleaned up Units and Conversions Factors
 - Updated area and volume formulas to ensure consistency and correctness
- DWAC Roles
 - Pursuant to subdivision (a) of Health and Safety Code section 106898, the State Water Board is required to appoint an advisory committee to assist it in carrying out its responsibilities. Subdivision (a) of Health and Safety Code section 106898 also requires that the advisory committee review all proposed regulations and make recommendations to the State Water Board before the adoption of a regulation or an amendment to a regulation.
 - In addition to reviewing regulations the advisory committee also assists the State Water Board in carrying out its responsibilities by providing input and feedback on other topics concerning the program such as exam validation, compliance, enforcement, fee

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changes, training relevancy, identifying training needs through examination performance, and program improvements.

- Fee Changes (Attachment B)
 - Authority, guiding principles, and process
 - Pursuant to subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890, the State Water Board is required to review its fees each fiscal year to ensure that the fees collected provide sufficient revenue to recover the costs of the DWOCP and to compensate for past over-collection or under-collection of revenue. Subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890 also authorizes the State Water Board to adopt amendments to the DWOCP fees through the emergency rulemaking process. The emergency regulations remain in effect until they are revised by the State Water Board.
 - The guiding principles for reviewing the DWOCP fees are:
 - Sustainable
 - Generates sufficient revenue to cover program expenditures
 - Works within legislative budgetary authority
 - The fee setting process entails:
 - Annual review of Program expenditures and revenue estimates
 - Reviewing each iteration of the budget
 - Determining if the fee schedule needs adjustments
 - Conducting an Advisory Committee meeting to discuss adjustments and proposed changes to the fee schedule
 - Taking the fee schedule proposed changes to the Board for approval
 - Implementing the approved fee schedule changes via the emergency rulemaking process
 - Background
 - The DWOCP's revenue comes from fees paid by applicants and certified operators. There are approximately 34,000 valid certificates held by approximately 25,000 water operators. The operational expenses for the DWOCP fall into three broad areas: 1) issuing and renewing certificates; 2) administering operator examinations; and 3) enforcement against operators, water distribution system owners, and water treatment facility owners that have violated the

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DWOCP Regulations. More specifically, the DWOCP's responsibilities include:

- Processing certification applications;
- Processing renewals for approximately 34,000 certificates once every 3 years;
- Processing examination applications;
- Administering examinations through CBT;
- Maintaining physical files, the Operator Certification database, and the DWOCP website;
- Conducting outreach and customer education, as necessary;
- Investigating complaints of misconduct and conducting appropriate enforcement actions;
- Amending the DWOCP Regulations, as necessary; and
- Coordinating with the DWOCP Advisory Committee.

▪ Program revenue and expenditures

- The costs to administer the DWOCP have consistently outpaced the revenue that the DWOCP collects. Operating costs have risen significantly and the primary factors driving the increases in operating costs include:
 - CBT
 - Staffing levels
 - Increases in staff salaries
- Currently Drinking Water State Revolving Fund – Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding is temporarily being used to subsidize expenditures. As a result, the subsidized expenditures are not reflected in attachment B.
- Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and cancellations of the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 examinations, the DWOCP experienced a reduction in examination and certification applications and associated fees. Fewer operators applied for the Fall 2020 examination, and because of the canceled examinations there was a reduced number of operators that qualified for certification. The DWOCP therefore experienced an unanticipated reduction in revenue.
- The OOC is currently evaluating future increases in fees taking into account the current fund reserve of approximately 3.4 million. Future fee increases will be necessary to ensure that enough revenue is collected to cover expenditures once the BIL funding currently subsidizing expenditures is no longer available, to close the gap between expenditures and revenues, and ensure a prudent fund reserve.

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- Whether to keep the T5 Exam an oral exam
 - At the Fall 2024 Advisory Committee meeting a recommendation was made, by an Advisory Committee member, to convert the Grade 5 treatment examination from an oral examination to computer based. There is no legal requirement that this examination must be an oral exam. However, during the discussion agreement amongst the Advisory Committee was not reached, this item was included on the agenda for this meeting to allow for continued discussion.
 - Productive discussion continued, however no consensus was reached. This item will be included on future Advisory Committee meeting agendas.

Item 5 – Meeting Recap

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

Drinking Water Operator Certification Program
April 17, 2025, Advisory Committee Meeting

Attachment A

Statistics

DISTRIBUTION		
	2023 7/1/2023- 12/31/2023	2024 7/1/2024-12/31/2024
Applications received (exam, cert, renewals)	4,471	6,345
Certificates issued (new and renewals)	2,964	3,212

TREATMENT		
	2023 7/1/2023- 12/31/2023	2024 7/1/2024-12/31/2024
Applications received (exam, cert, renewals)	3,197	4,127
Certificates issued (new and renewals)	1,907	2,176

DISTRIBUTION - NUMBER OF VALID CERTIFICATES						
Grade	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024
1	3,602	3,585	3,566	3,588	3,539	3,475
2	9,687	9,634	9,571	9,552	9,505	9,389
3	4,141	4,113	4,078	4,061	4,045	4,022
4	1,873	1,866	1,857	1,850	1,842	1,835
5	1,313	1,309	1,304	1,302	1,297	1,293
Total	20,616	20,507	20,376	20,353	20,228	20,014

TREATMENT - NUMBER OF VALID CERTIFICATES						
Grade	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024
1	2,245	2,207	2,199	2,193	2,188	2,183
2	8,643	8,537	8,512	8,499	8,487	8,477
3	1,905	1,900	1,896	1,894	1,888	1,886
4	1,058	1,057	1,056	1,052	1,048	1,046
5	546	541	535	533	533	533
Total	14,397	14,242	14,198	14,171	14,144	14,125

Drinking Water Operator Certification Program - Statistics
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Treatment Grade 5 examinations are oral exams and not conducted via computer-based testing

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL				
Reporting Period 7/1/2023 - 12/31/2023				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
Dist. Grade 1	396	247	149	62%
Dist. Grade 2	747	503	244	67%
Dist. Grade 3	290	191	99	66%
Dist. Grade 4	142	82	60	58%
Dist. Grade 5	65	40	25	62%
Treat. Grade 1	184	122	62	66%
Treat. Grade 2	487	318	169	65%
Treat. Grade 3	148	103	45	70%
Treat. Grade 4	63	43	20	68%

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL				
Reporting Period 7/1/2024 - 12/31/2024				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
Dist. Grade 1	574	351	223	61%
Dist. Grade 2	894	566	328	63%
Dist. Grade 3	331	198	133	60%
Dist. Grade 4	158	94	64	59%
Dist. Grade 5	78	37	41	47%
Treat. Grade 1	279	168	111	60%
Treat. Grade 2	652	378	274	58%
Treat. Grade 3	192	110	82	57%
Treat. Grade 4	67	41	26	61%

CUMULATIVE COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL				
Reporting Period: 2/20/2021 (CBT Inception) – 12/31/2024				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
Dist. Grade 1	3,926	2,535	1,391	65%
Dist. Grade 2	6,628	4,386	2,242	67%
Dist. Grade 3	2,639	1,639	1,000	62%
Dist. Grade 4	1,233	699	534	56%
Dist. Grade 5	571	329	242	57%
Treat. Grade 1	1,957	1,205	752	61%
Treat. Grade 2	4,545	2,924	1,621	65%
Treat. Grade 3	1,308	855	453	64%
Treat. Grade 4	548	337	211	60%

Treatment Grade 5 examinations are oral exams and not conducted via computer-based testing

TREATMENT GRADE 5 ORAL EXAM PASS/FAIL Reporting Period: Fall 2023 8/7/2023 - 8/9/2023 and 8/14/2023 - 8/17/2023				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
Treat. Grade 5	49	17	32	34%

TREATMENT GRADE 5 ORAL EXAM PASS/FAIL Reporting Period: Fall 2024 8/19/2024 - 8/21/2024 and 8/26/2024 - 8/29/2024				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
Treat. Grade 5	47	27	20	57%

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Distribution Operators Age March 2025											
Age	< 25	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 44	45 - 49	50 - 54	55 - 59	60 - 65	> 65	Total
D1	157	343	419	465	450	363	276	303	315	339	3,430
D2	280	733	1,220	1,474	1,390	1,174	964	828	812	429	9,304
D3	26	145	354	561	694	596	507	504	422	183	3,992
D4	1	28	117	227	327	283	267	254	195	99	1,798
D5	-	4	42	123	215	209	185	206	180	103	1,267
Total	464	1,253	2,152	2,850	3,076	2,625	2,199	2,095	1,924	1,153	19,791

Avg. Age		>60	>55
D1	44.7	19.1%	27.9%
D2	44.1	13.3%	22.2%
D3	46.9	15.2%	27.8%
D4	48.4	16.4%	30.5%
D5	50.7	22.3%	38.6%
Total	47.0	15.5%	26.1%

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Treatment Operators Age March 2025											
Age	< 25	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 44	45 - 49	50 - 54	55 - 59	60 - 65	> 65	Total
T1	54	160	244	296	279	310	206	213	197	157	2,116
T2	166	530	946	1,291	1,350	1,076	853	841	826	413	8,292
T3	6	59	129	252	281	245	233	234	261	193	1,893
T4	-	13	54	126	138	142	150	146	145	127	1,041
T5	-	1	13	39	72	60	79	81	98	84	527
Total	226	763	1,386	2,004	2,120	1,833	1,521	1,515	1,527	974	13,869

Avg. Age		>60	>55
T1	45.5	16.7%	26.8%
T2	45.2	14.9%	25.1%
T3	49.1	24.0%	36.3%
T4	50.6	26.1%	40.2%
T5	53.3	34.5%	49.9%
Total	48.7	18.0%	29.0%

Division of Financial Assistance Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Fee Schedule Changes April 9, 2025

*Presented by:
Keisha Kelley, Program Manager*



Discussion Items

1. Fee Setting: Authority, Guiding Principles, Process
2. Background
3. Program Revenue and Expenditures
4. Open Discussion and Question

Authority Guiding Principles Process



Fee Setting

Authority and Guiding Principles

Pursuant to subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890, the State Water Board is required to review its fees each fiscal year to ensure that the fees collected provide sufficient revenue to recover the costs of the DWOCP and to compensate for past over-collection or under-collection of revenue. Subdivision (d) of Health and Safety Code section 106890 also authorizes the State Water Board to adopt amendments to the DWOCP fees through the emergency rulemaking process. The emergency regulations remain in effect until they are revised by the State Water Board.

- Sustainable
- Generates sufficient revenue to cover Program expenditures
- Works within legislative budgetary authority

Fee Setting

Process

- Review expenditures and revenue estimates annually
- Review of budgets
- Determine fee adjustments
- Conduct Advisory Committee meeting
- Approval by the Board
- Implement fee adjustments via the emergency rulemaking process

Background



Specific Responsibilities

- Processing certification applications;
- Processing renewals for approximately 34,000 certificates once every 3 years;
- Processing examination applications;
- Administering examinations through computer-based testing (CBT);
- Maintaining physical files, the Operator Certification database (OCIS), and the DWOCP website;
- Conducting outreach and customer education, as necessary;
- Investigating complaints of misconduct and conduct appropriate enforcement actions;
- Amending the DWOCP Regulations, as necessary; and
- Coordinating with the DWOCP Advisory Committee.

Program Revenue and Expenditures

(amounts listed in thousands)

	FY 2016/17	FY 2017/18	FY 2018/19	FY 2019/20
Revenue	\$1,704	\$1,702	\$1,680	1,641
Expenditures	\$1,737	\$1,830	\$1,861	2,035
Difference	(\$33)	(\$128)	(\$181)	(\$394)
% Difference	-1.9%	-6.99%	-9.72%	-19.36%

	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24
Revenue	1,164	1,447	1,495	1,596
Expenditures	1,674	2,780	2,199	2,448
Difference	(\$510)	(\$1,333)	(\$704)	(\$852)
% Difference	-30.47%	-47.95%	-32.01%	-34.8%
Fund Balance				\$3,413

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Open Discussion and Questions