

Office of Operator Certification (OOC)

Drinking Water Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes – October 2022

Meeting Date: Wednesday October 26, 2022

Attendees: **Advisory Committee Members**

Michael Maestas, Ramzi Mahmood, Jose Martinez, Tai Tseng, John Brady, Dan DeMoss, Steven Gardner, Chris Castaing, Gregory Williams, Jim McVeigh

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Joe Karkoski, Annette Caraway, Michael Rohner, Neal Funston, Julie Osborn, Jessica Sanchez, Bryan Elder, Tomas Eggers, Christopher Walker, Rebecca Tindell-Hofman, Ruby Torres, Annette Caraway, Randy Barnard, Alessandra Langen

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 CA-NV AWWA Fall Conference at the Sacramento Convention Center. Introduced Waterboards staff and Advisory Committee Members.

Item 2 - Agenda Review

- Agenda Item 3 Public Comments moved to last item due to the size of attendance.

Item 9 – California Rural Water Association (CRWA) Apprenticeship Program - Dan DeMoss - CRWA

- Program is 4-5 years old. Provides a way for employed workers to become fully qualified as an operator since there is an increasing demand for operators due to current operators reaching their retirement age. Both drinking water and wastewater programs are two years in duration. Along with mentorship from those already in the industry, it is a good way to get skilled workers in the industry especially in rural areas. Two programs are offered in both Treatment and Distribution; an incumbent program for those that are already hired, and a new program for those new to the drinking water industry. Both programs consist of 288 hours of formal training courses along with 4,000 hours of on the job training. For more information contact Dan DeMoss ddemoss@calruralwater.org

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Item 5 – Enforcement Update – Bryan Elder and Tomas Eggers- State Water Board Office of Enforcement

- Special Investigations Unit (SIU) division of the Office of Enforcement (OE) investigates complaints against operators and systems(?). The types of complaints that are being investigated are exam misconduct, certification levels not meeting the requirements, falsifying documentation, any fraudulent or misleading claims. COVID-19 allowed for the backlog of investigations to be cleared. Bryan introduced new unit chief, Tomas Eggers. There are 17 open investigations, seven of those in drinking water. The remaining 10 are of Wastewater operators.
- Q: Is there priority for OE regarding contract operators? Smaller systems have the most health-based violations and those are the ones most likely to use contract operators.

A: OE does not currently have this as priority. OE does not see a trend in cases for smaller systems and contract operators.

Since there is no industry standard for documenting certifications, OE would like to advocate for changes in regulation to see a standard implemented. Most referrals about misconduct come from OOC, agencies, water systems, and operators.

Item 6 – Recycled/Advanced Water Treatment (AWT) – Steven Garner CA-NV AWWA

- This certification program has been in existence for three years. 108 operators currently hold Grade 3-5 certificate in AWT through CA-NV AWWA. 108 hold Grade 3, 38 with a Grade 4, and 19 with a Grade 5 certification. For operators looking for education options, look at the associations, industry, unions, and academia as resources. CA-NV AWWA has thorough resources and “need to know” criteria on their website.

Item 7 – Regulatory Update from Division of Drinking Water (DDW) (Surface Water Augmentation, etc.) – Randy Barnard DDW

- Regulatory updates available on the Waterboards website. Draft of Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) regulations on the website as well. Currently soliciting comments regard Advanced Water Treatment.

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Item 4 – United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Update – Adam Ramos USEPA No updated provided. Adam Ramos did not attend.

Item 8 – DWOC Program Update

- Introduced new Advisory Committee Members. Once vacancy on committee, LPA. Submit vacancy nominations to Alessandra Langen for information Alessandra.langen@waterboards.ca.gov
- July 26, 2022 Joint Advisory Committee meeting proposed fee increases in FY 23/24 and formed sub workgroups to address CA-NV AWWA/CWEA whitepaper.
- Online application portal to come in 2023. Where operators can view and submit exam, certification, and renewal applications. Phased roll out.
- Customer service survey coming in 2023. Will be sent on the Drinking Water Operator Certification Program's distribution list as well as posted to website.
- Q: Will portal be for exams? A: Eventually for everything, first phase will be exams.
- Q: Is there still a backlog on exam applications?
 - A: It has been cleared, 2-3 weeks for testing notification to be emailed and 120-day exam window given once approved. Once the notice has been received it is advised to schedule for the exam as soon as the notification is received.
- Q: Suggestion to have calculators/conversion sheets physically available?
A: Each examination site has a limited number of calculators available. If the site has calculators available, the operator may ask to use it but cannot bring in their own calculator. The conversion sheets are provided on the computer.
- Q: Update on T5 exams.
 - A: Final filing date for fall/winter testing was October 14, 2022. Exam to take place December 2022. Details to come.
- Comment: Request to have updated modern monitors, calculators at exam site.
- Sub Workgroups:
 - AB1588 Steven Garner CA-NV AWWA
 - This bill's purpose is to incorporate military training into requirements for exam taking and the certification process. The goal is to model the evaluating process to be like other states and similar between Drinking Water and Wastewater.
 - Find ways to apply military experience regarding exams, reciprocity. The objective is to establish a clear process for military personnel to receive cred for water operator experience gained while serving in the US military. The date of completion goal is September of 2023. Websites like My Next Move and O' Net Online provide a military crosswalk to the civilian side of the water industry. It has created a presence on the national level in the

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American Council of Education and the local level in CA/NV AWWA basecamp site for the gathering of resources and job titles. There is a survey of other jurisdictions identifying processes to grant reciprocity. The Defense Department issues a DD-214 to each veteran identifying the veteran's condition of discharge - honorable, general, other than honorable, dishonorable, or bad conduct and includes a record of their training and or certificates received. Texas is one of the states surveyed using similar methods. CWA/AWWA and AWC are developing standardized testing. Dr John Rowe, of the Office of Water Programs at CSUS provides relevant training.

- Operator in Training Requirements/Experience (OIT)
 - The biggest challenge for an OIT (Operator in Training) is satisfying the educational requirements and then gathering the experience. The ultimate focus of the OIT Program is to maintain public health and safety. The program is important in looking at workforce development. The committee is working on incorporating questions for a satisfaction survey that will be issued by CWEA within the next few weeks.
- Guidelines for Reporting Operator Experience
 - Industry need, ongoing need for new operators. Improving the Grade 3-5 certification process. OIT not a required for DW just WW. Four meetings thus far established a goal to reduce the review period to four weeks. Better define eligibility for certificate upgrade. Focusing on the workflow process and creating a “perfect” certification application package. Plans to format a universal template letter for operator experience.
 - Q: Standardized letters? A: That is one of many options, a template of some sort is in the works.
 - Q: Will that be part of the on-line portal? A: Eventually that will be the case.
- One Water Regime
 - Meeting is held weekly. The mission statement of the One Water Regime has been developed, which will define the purpose, and what water means in California. The group is using SWOT analysis for brainstorming and SWOT analysis to be used for developing opportunities for how to use water in California. Also looking at how other states are defining one water. Google Drive will be used to collaborate with others and collect information in the One Water Regime.

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Item 3 - Public Comments

- Larry Lyford: Thank DW for coming to AWWA Fall Conference. Exalted all to come to Annette's roundtable discussion at 1:00p.
- CWEA thanked DWOCP for their collaboration and workgroups.
- Q: Why don't operators get full credit for working WW and DW? A: This subject is being considered by the operator experience subgroup.
- Q: Why is WW and DW lab experience not being considered? A: Operator subgroup will have to look at that issue.
- Jody Hack is seeking panelists for the T5 exam. Those interested email Annette Caraway. Annette.caraway@waterboards.ca.gov.

Item 11 - Schedule next meeting

- Next meeting: April 19,2023. Location TBD