Office of Operator Certification (OOC)
Wastewater Operator Certification Program (WWOCP) Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – April 9, 2025

Meeting Date: **Wednesday, April 9, 2025**

Attendees: **Advisory Committee Members**

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

State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Joshua Ziese, Helen Wuellner, Keisha Kelley, Julie Osborn, Valerie Gregory, Jon Hermison, Sarah Miller, Tomas Eggers, Antonio Aguilar

Public

Kevin Barricklow

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 for note taking purposes only and will be deleted after meeting minutes are prepared.

Item 3 – Public Comments

- There were no public comments.

Item 4 – Office of Enforcement (OE) Updates

- Tomas Eggers provided an OE update October 2024 to present
    - 3 open cases currently
    - 4 new cases opened
    - 10 cases closed
        - 3 for insufficient evidence

- 6 with no action
- One with 3 disciplinary actions
  - The disciplinary action started out as a suspension.
  - Action was changed to a revocation following an additional incident.
  - While waiting for the operator to respond to the proposed disciplinary action, the cert expired. Since there was no longer a valid cert to take action against, the proposed revocation became moot.
  - OE closed the case with a recommendation not to renew the operator's expired certificate.

Item 5 – WWOCP Updates

- Advisory Committee Vacancies
  - The WWOCP Advisory Committee has 3 vacancies:
    - 1 open position for a representative from an organized labor union to represent Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) operators.
    - 1 open position for a representative from a university, state university school, or division of engineering
    - 1 open position for a representative from a statewide organization representing local sanitation agencies, other than agencies which represent municipalities, including counties or private utility wastewater treatment plants. (New vacancy due to retirement)
  - The OOC recently solicited for nominations to fill the vacant positions for a representative from an organized labor union to represent WWTP operators and a representative from a university, state university school, or division of engineering.
  - Only 1 of the nominations received met the qualifications to fill a vacancy. The OOC intends to recommend appointment of that nominee and will re-solicit to fill the remaining 2 vacancies.

- Staffing Update
  - Last fall the OOC had 3 vacancies:
    - 1 vacant Drinking Water Certification Analyst position in Unit 2 (filled 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 related 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 required regulatory 30-day time frame.

- Program statistics (Attachment A)
  - A comparison of applications received, and the number of certifications issued for the same 6-month period in 2023 and 2024 (Attachment A page 1).
  - Certifications – number of valid certificates by grade for each month from July – December 2024 (Attachment A page 1)
  - Examinations – (Attachment A page 2)
    - pass/fail statistics for the same 6-month period in 2023 and 2024.
    - Cumulative CBT pass/fail statistics.
  - Age report (Attachment A page 3)
    - Number of valid certificates by grade and operator age

- 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 online, and track application statuses.
  - 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 Drinking Water Operation Certification Program (DWOCP) and WWOCP.
  - 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 Boards Division of Information Technology on the development of electronic renewal applications. We anticipate 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.

- 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 – February 2025.
  - There were 18 respondents total for this survey period and the weighted average for overall experience with the OOC program was 3.7 out of 5.

- o 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 OOC staff to address and resolve any issues, if applicable.
  - o Survey results covering the 6-month period of March 2025 – August 2025 will be provided to Advisory Committee members and stakeholders via email in September 2025.

- Regulation scoping
  - o In May 2024, OOC staff began conducting frequent meetings to initiate scoping regulatory updates necessary for each program.
  - o OOC staff have completed the initial outlines which are undergoing internal review.
    - The sub work group recommendation to modify the Operator-in-Training (OIT) education requirement so that the required six education points may be earned after the OIT certification is obtained but prior to expiration has been included in regulation scoping.
    - We 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.

- Examination Validation
  - o Background: A small sub work group comprised of three advisory committee members, our program engineer, exam analyst, and management was created in March of this calendar year.
  - o Validation includes evaluation the exam questions for correctness, clarity, relevance, and grade appropriateness. Pass/fail rates of each question are considered as well while evaluating.
  - o The sub work group meets twice a month:
    - Completed validation of exam versions A-C for all grades
    - Working on validation of exam versions D and E for all grades
- Fee Changes (Attachment B)
  - o Authority, guiding principles, and process
    - Pursuant to subdivision (e) of Water Code section 13628, the State Water Board is required to review its fees each fiscal year (FY) to ensure that the fees collected provide sufficient revenue to recover the costs of the WWOCP and to compensate for past over-collection or under-collection of revenue. Subdivision (e) of Water Code section 13628 also authorizes the State Water Board to adopt amendments to the WWOCP 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 WWOCP 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 WWOCP's revenue comes from fees paid by applicants, certified operators, and registered contract operators for various services associated with certification. There are approximately 6,000 certified WWTP operators. The operational expenses for WWOCP fall into three broad areas: 1) issuing and renewing certificates and registrations; 2) administering operator examinations; and 3) enforcement against operators, contract operators, and wastewater treatment plant owners that have violated the WWOCP Regulations. More specifically, the WWOCP's responsibilities include:
        - Processing certification applications;
        - Processing renewals for approximately 6,000 operators once every 3 years;
        - Classifying WWTPs;
        - Processing examination applications;
        - Administering examinations through computer-based testing (CBT);
        - Registering and renewing approximately 75 contract operator registrations;
        - Maintaining physical files, the Operator Certification database (OCIS), and the WWOCP website;
        - Conducting outreach and customer education, as necessary;
        - Investigating complaints of misconduct and conducting appropriate enforcement actions;
        - Amending the WWOCP Regulations, as necessary; and
        - Coordinating with the WWOCP Advisory Committee.

- o Program revenue and expenditures
    - Effective November 16, 2017, the WWOCP fees were reduced with the goal of lowering the fund reserve to a prudent reserve of $1 million over six years.
    - Since 2017 the costs to administer the WWOCP have consistently outpaced the revenue that the WWOCP collects. Although the level of effort to administer the WWOCP has remained relatively steady and no additional staff are anticipated for future WWOCP operations, the associated operating costs have risen significantly since the WWOCP fees were reduced. Increases in staff salaries are the primary factor driving the increases in operating costs.
    - Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and cancelations of the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 examinations, the WWOCP 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 WWOCP therefore experienced an additional unanticipated reduction in revenue, which has decreased the WWOCP Fund's reserves.
    - This past summer we met with the WWOCP Advisory Committee and proposed a 25 percent fee increase. Taking the estimated fund balance into consideration for FY 23-24, a 25 percent fee increase was the smallest increase sufficient to cover expenditures for FY 24-25. However, WWOCP expenditures would continue to exceed revenues by approximately $532,000 for the FY and future fee increases would be necessary to close the gap between expenditures and revenues and achieve a prudent fund reserve.
    - As a result of this discussion the Advisory Committee recommended three years of fee increases at equal rates.
    - Taking the Advisory Committees recommendations into consideration we adjusted our proposal to a 35 percent fee increase for FY 24-25 with the plan to propose 35 percent fee increases for FY 25-26 and 26-27.
    - Effective September 2024 the WWOCP fees increased by 35 percent. Estimated revenue for FY 24-25 is projected to be over 1 million and expenditures are projected to be about 1.3 million.
    - We project that a 35 percent fee increase effective FY 25-26 will close the remaining gap between expenditures and revenue

- Language access and exam translation
    - o Over the years the State water Board has received inquiries regarding the ability to take OOC examinations in other languages, mainly Spanish.

- o The Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs (OPEETA) has attended a prior DWOCP Advisory Committee meeting and initiated discussion regarding language access and exam translation.
- o The WWOCP Advisory Committee members were asked if they would like OPEETA to attend future WWOCP advisory committee meetings to provide updates on the discussions regarding language access and exam translation. The consensus amongst the Advisory Committee was that it was not needed at this time.

Item 6 – Next Advisory Committee Meeting

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

Statistics

WASTEWATER		
	2023 **7/1/2023- 12/31/2023**	**2024** **7/1/2024-12/31/2024**
Applications received (exam, cert, renewals)	2,003	2,149
Certificates issued (new and renewals)	1,304	1,313

NUMBER OF VALID CERTIFICATES						
Grade	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024
OIT	568	602	635	669	691	691
1	735	748	761	774	783	783
2	1,394	1,413	1,432	1,451	1,466	1,470
3	1,737	1,756	1,775	1,794	1,805	1,806
4	408	410	412	414	415	416
5	1,056	1,059	1,062	1,065	1,069	1,069
Total	5,898	5,988	6,077	6,167	6,229	6,235

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL Reporting Period 7/1/2023 - 12/31/2023				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
WW Grade 1	148	84	64	57%
WW Grade 2	164	97	67	59%
WW Grade 3	164	60	104	37%
WW Grade 4	54	14	40	26%
WW Grade 5	79	18	61	23%

COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL Reporting Period 7/1/2024 - 12/31/2024				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
WW Grade 1	193	99	94	51%
WW Grade 2	215	112	103	52%
WW Grade 3	201	76	125	38%
WW Grade 4	47	13	34	28%
WW Grade 5	83	18	65	22%

CUMULATIVE COMPUTER-BASED TESTING PASS/FAIL Reporting Period: 2/20/2021 (CBT Inception) – 12/31/2024				
Grade	Examinees	Pass Count	Fail Count	Pass Percent
WW Grade 1	1,416	766	650	54%
WW Grade 2	1,460	793	667	54%
WW Grade 3	1,342	461	881	34%
WW Grade 4	388	101	287	26%
WW Grade 5	649	160	489	24%

Wastewater 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
OIT	96	128	129	103	95	53	27	19	11	3	664
Gr I	18	59	107	120	114	87	84	78	74	58	799
Gr II	15	64	144	201	209	186	158	166	196	130	1,469
Gr III	3	61	171	256	284	216	180	195	256	196	1,818
Gr IV	-	1	21	37	50	56	41	48	73	92	419
Gr V	1	14	59	117	153	92	99	127	187	233	1,082
Total	133	327	631	834	905	690	589	633	797	712	6,251

	Avg. Age	**>60**	**>55**
OIT	35.6	2.1%	5.0%
Gr I	45.1	16.5%	26.3%
Gr II	47.7	22.2%	33.5%
Gr III	48.5	24.9%	35.6%
Gr IV	53.1	39.4%	50.8%
Gr V	52.4	38.8%	50.6%
Total	**47.5**	24.1%	34.3%

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

Presented by:
Keisha Kelley, Program Manager

CALIFORNIA
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Discussion Items

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

Authority
Guiding Principles
Process

Background

Program Revenue and Expenditures

(amounts listed in thousands)

	FY 2016/17	FY 2017/18	FY 2018/19	FY 2019/20
Revenue	$1,265	$1,008	$703	$682
Expenditures	$1,037	$1,046	$1,212	$969
Difference	$228	($38)	($509)	($287)
% Difference	21.99%	-3.63%	-41.99%	-29.62%

	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24
Revenue	$571	$630	$608	$771
Expenditures	$985	$1,388	$1,212	$1,077
Difference	($414)	($758)	($604)	($306)
% Difference	-42.03%	-54.61%	-49.84%	-28.41%
Fund Balance				$891

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Proposed Fee Change

	FY 2024/25 Estimate	TOTALS	FY 2025/26 Estimate	TOTALS
				35% Fee Increase
Revenue				
Fees	$1,041		$1,405	
Subtotal		**$1,041**		**$1,405**
Expenditures				
Personnel Services	$1,150		$1,150	
Supplemental Pension Assessment	$16		$16	
Pro Rata	$65		$65	
Contract – Computer Based Testing	$150		$154	
Subtotal		**$1,381**		**$1,385**
Difference		($340)		$20
Difference %		-24.62%		1.44%

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Open Discussion and Questions