

Certification of Public Water System Operators

Introduction

The Department of Public Health has required the certification of public water system operators since 1937. A formal program was adopted in 1982. The Department has revised this program to meet new Federal Guidelines. These changes affect operators of all community and non-transient non-community water systems. This brochure describes operator certification, previous requirements and recent changes.

Why Certify?

Why is it necessary to certify operators of public water systems? Certification of operators is a mechanism to:

- ensure that qualified personnel are operating water systems;
- minimize public health concerns;
- develop public trust & confidence in drinking water;
- maximize the performance of the system;
- protect the safety of the operators;
- improve compliance with regulations;
- optimize operation costs;
- protect the system's equipment;
- establish the job as a profession;
- maintain minimum operators education/knowledge.

Present Requirements

Under the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published guidelines for minimum standards for certification in February 1999. States had until February 2001 to implement the guidelines to ensure that 20% of their State Revolving Fund (SRF) funding continued to be available. This would mean a benefit of approximately \$1.25 million for water system projects in Connecticut.

The Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies were amended in July 2001 to meet the EPA guidelines. The EPA approved Connecticut's Operator Certification Program in November 2001. Present regulations include the following:

- All Community Water Systems and all Non-Transient Non-Community Water Systems are required to have their Water Treatment Plants, Distribution Systems, and Small Water Systems operated by certified operators.
- Treatment Plants are divided into four classifications by a point system based on plant size, flow, and

complexity. Distribution Systems are divided into three classifications based on populations served. A Small Water System serves less than 1000 persons and has no treatment.

- To become certified an operator must meet specific education and experience requirements, based on the plant or system classification, and pass an examination. Operators must renew their certificates every three years by meeting specific training hour requirements for renewal.

Expense Reimbursement Grant

In February 2003, the Drinking Water Division received approval for the Expense Reimbursement Grant, or ERG. The ERG is funding provided by EPA for supporting training and certification for operators of Non-Transient Non-Community and Community Public Water Systems that serve 3,300 persons or less. Specifically, the ERG funding will be applied to the following areas:

- Offering free training courses to eligible operators.
- Exam fee waivers.
- Updating the “Public Water System Operator Certification Handbook.”
- Distributing pertinent operator information through a newsletter.

Additional information can be obtained from the following:

- The CT Section of the American Water Works Association at www.ctawwa.org or 203.757.1855
- The Association of State Drinking Water Administrators at www.asdwa.org or 202.293.7655
- The American Ground Water Trust at www.agwt.org or 603.228.5444
- The State Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) at www.ct.gov/pura or 1.800.382.4586.
- The Atlantic States Rural Water and Wastewater Association at www.asrwwa.org or at 860.889.6373

More Information

Additional information is available at the Drinking Water Section Homepage at www.ct.gov/dphpublicdrinkingwater.

There are several operator certification documents available, including a guidance document for the approval of training acceptable for renewal, lists of duties and responsibilities of public water system operators, lists of approved training courses and providers, exam dates and applications, and a list of certified operators available for contract work. The DWS staff can provide you with answers regarding the certification of public water supply system operators, as well as provide water supply systems and certified operators technical assistance. Contact the DWS for more information at (860) 509-7333.

To learn more about public drinking water contact the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1.800.426.4791, or log on to www.epa.gov. To learn more about the Safe Drinking Water Act, log on to EPA’s Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water at: www.epa.gov/safewater/sdwa/sdwa.html.