



RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Operator Certification



Annual Report

2011

OFFICE of DRINKING WATER QUALITY

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Introduction

This annual report is prepared by the Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water Quality, (HEALTH). The report covers the period of January 1, 2011 through December 31, 2011. It is prepared in fulfillment of the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and presented to the Environmental Protection Agency, Region I, Operator Certification Program Office.

This report details the State of Rhode Island's compliance with the nine major program components outlined in the guidelines for the certification and recertification of operators of community and non-transient community public water systems.

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Authorization

Regulatory Changes

The state of Rhode Island Board of Certification of Operators of Public Water Supply Treatment and Public Water Supply Transmission and Distribution Facilities (Board), did not amend the Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Certification of Public Water Supply Transmission and Distribution Facilities [R23-65-DWQ] (Rules & Regulations), during the reporting period. The board continues to meet quarterly to review the applicability and suitability of the rules and regulations. A review of the rules and regulations is ongoing. Initial subcommittee reports were due August 27, 2010. A review of subcommittee recommendations was taken to community review on Tuesday, April 12, 2011 at 1:30 PM. The Board reviewed comments received, and invited representatives of the state's water systems to a meeting in September 2011, to review the comments and to clarify the language and intent of the proposed changes. As a result changes were made and a draft is currently under review with the Department.

Classification of Systems, Facilities, and Operators

There are one hundred sixty-four (164) community and non-transient non-community public water systems that are required to comply with the state's operator certification regulations. The state has classified all of these systems for distribution and/or treatment. Presently, all are under the supervision of a certified operator.

The State's ninety-nine percent compliance rate can be attributed in large part to the continual follow up performed by Drinking Water Quality staff.

OPERATOR CERTIFICATIONS

License Type	License Count
DO Class 1-Full	87
DO Class 1-Grandfathered	31
DO Class 1-Operator in Training	22
DO Class 2-Full	68
DO Class 2-Grandfathered	2
DO Class 2-Operator in Training	1
DO Class 3-Full	90
DO Class 3-Grandfathered	1
DO Class 3-Operator in Training	6
DO Class 4-Full	32
DO Class 4-Grandfathered	1
DO Class VSS-Full	39
DO Class VSS-Grandfathered	29
DO Class VSS-Operator in Training	2
DO Provisional	1

License Type	License Count
TO Class 1-Full	64
TO Class 1-Grandfathered	16
TO Class 1-Operator in Training	16
TO Class 2-Full	58
TO Class 2-Grandfathered	4
TO Class 2-Operator in Training	5
TO Class 3-Full	69
TO Class 3-Grandfathered	5
TO Class 3-Operator in Training	8
TO Class 4-Full	20
TO Class 4-Grandfathered	2
TO Class VSS-Full	12
TO Class VSS-Grandfathered	6
TO Class VSS-Operator in Training	2
TO Provisional	1

Operator Qualifications

The State of Rhode Island's revised operation certification regulations contain a grandfathering provision; requests were due by February 28, 2003. The State's Drinking Water Operator Certification Board approved all requests through February 28, 2003.

It has been the goal of the state to reduce the number of small system grandfathered operators. There were 97-grandfathered operators in 2011 and 112 in 2010; a decrease of 15 grandfathered licenses. Grandfathered operators are often replaced by operators certified through examination due to decisions to retire and or termination of employment.

Water Treatment Operator Qualifications

Information current as of	2011			
Is certification mandatory?	Yes			
Number of Active Certifications	420			
Level Name (lowest to highest)	1	2	3	4
Education Requirements	HS	HS	HS / AS / BS	AS / BS
Training Requirements				
Experience Requirements	6 mths	2 yrs	4 yrs / 2 yrs / 1 yr	4 yrs / 2 yrs
Number of exam questions	100	100	100	100
Passing Score (%)	70	70	70	70
Continuing Education Requirements (Hrs/3 years)	15	15	30	30
Application Review Fee				
Fee to take an exam for the first time	37.50	37.50	37.50	37.50
Fee to retake an exam	37.50	37.50	37.50	37.50
Fee to renew a certificate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

General Information	
Is Direct Responsible Charge required for certification? (Direct Responsible Charge is active daily on-site technical direction and supervision or active daily on-site accountability of a facility or a major segment of a facility.)	No
How are plants/systems rated (By technology/By flow/By population served)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology
Is Operator In Training certification offered for those who do not meet experience requirements?	Yes
Are substitutions allowed for any certification requirements?	No
Is an exam required for certification?	Yes
Type of exam (Multiple choice; Essay/short answer; True/False; Performance; Combination)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple choice • True / False
How is the exam taken (Paper and pencil/On computer/Internet)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencil and paper
Are open book exams allowed?	No
Is there a sequential exam requirement? (That is, operators must start with the lowest level of exam, and pass each exam in sequence; they may not immediately take the highest level of exam for which they are otherwise qualified.)	No, there is no sequential exam requirement
Is certification renewal required?	Yes
Renewal interval (years)	3
Note if varies by category or level:	2 year renewal period for operators in training
Notes	No operator in training classification for grade 4 operators. Must qualify for full certification when applying to take exam.

Water Distribution Operator Qualifications

Information current as of	2011			
Is certification mandatory?	Yes			
Number of Active Certifications	278			
Level Information				
Level Name (lowest to highest)	1	2	3	4
Education Requirements	HS	HS	HS / AS / BS	AS / BS
Training Requirements				
Experience Requirements	6 mths	2 yrs	4 yrs / 2 yrs / 1 yr	4 yrs / 2 yrs
Number of exam questions	100	100	100	100
Passing Score (%)	70	70	70	70
Continuing Education Requirements (Hrs/3 years)	15	15	30	30
Application Review Fee	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Fee to take an exam for the first time	37.50	37.50	37.50	37.50
Fee to retake an exam	37.50	37.50	37.50	37.50
General Information				
Is Direct Responsible Charge required for certification? (Direct Responsible Charge is active daily on-site technical direction and supervision or active daily on-site accountability of a facility or a major segment of a facility.)	No			
How are plants/systems rated (By technology/By flow/By population served)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population Served 			
Is Operator In Training certification offered for those who do not meet experience requirements?	Yes			

Are substitutions allowed for any certification requirements?	No
Is an exam required for certification?	Yes
Type of exam (Multiple choice; Essay/short answer; True/False; Performance; Combination)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple choice • True / False
How is the exam taken (Paper and pencil/On computer/Internet)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencil and paper
Are open book exams allowed?	No
Is there a sequential exam requirement? (That is, operators must start with the lowest level of exam, and pass each exam in sequence; they may not immediately take the highest level of exam for which they are otherwise qualified.)	No, there is no sequential exam requirement
Is certification renewal required?	Yes
Renewal interval (years)	3
Note if varies by category or level:	2 year renewal period for operators in training
Notes	No operator in training classification for grade 4 operators. Must qualify for full certification when applying to take exam.

Enforcement and Discipline

The Board has the responsibility for disciplinary action against individual operators. The Board may revoke, suspend, or otherwise discipline the holder of a certificate issued under the regulations when it is found that the individual performed his/her duties in a negligent manner that produced a supply below standards normal for the particular facility operated; or that he/she has practiced fraud or deception; or that reasonable care, judgment or application of this knowledge or ability was not used in the performance of his/her duties or that an individual is incompetent or unable to perform his/her duties in violation of Chapter 46-13 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, as amended or regulations promulgated pursuant to 46-13. All hearings and appeals are conducted in accordance with the "Administrative Procedures Act", Chapter 42-35 of the General Laws of RI as amended.

Disciplinary Actions

During 2010 staff instituted a program for tracking PWS violation history in relation to the designated operator in charge. Staff undertakes an annual review of any public water system with four or more violations. The Board secretary then presents the Board with a report that outlines the causes of each violation. In the event a history of violations is determined to be due to operator negligence, the Board will meet with the operator in an effort to uncover a resolution either through disciplinary action or by requiring additional education.

The Board dealt with 2 disciplinary cases against individual operators during the reporting period.

- In the first case the Board determined the cause of violations to be a lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Total Coliform Rule and performance of duties in a manner below the reasonable standard of care required for the protection of public health. The operator in this case is a contract operator and a letter of reprimand was entered into the operators file with a suggestion by the board that additional TCR training and stronger operator/owner communications are needed.
- In the second case the Board determined the cause of violations to be a lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Total Coliform Rule, the Groundwater

Rule, and proper disinfection procedures. The Board required an additional 30 hours training in these areas and the operator is currently completing this requirement.

Certification

The Board continues to maintain membership in the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC). ABC provides exam development, standardizing of exams, and exam validation services to the state.

Treatment, distribution and VSS examinations are offered annually in April, July, and November. The state uses the standardized exam format. Exams are held in the auditorium at the Department of Health and proctored by the Operator Certification Program Manager.

Reporting period exam results are provided in the chart below.

April 2011	Distribution	Treatment	VSS	Total
Applications Received	33	30	2	65
Exams Failed	17	14	0	31
Exams Passed	16	16	2	34
July 2011				
	Distribution	Treatment	VSS	Total
Applications Received	28	13	2	43
Exams Failed	12	6	1	19
Exams Passed	16	7	1	24
November 2011				
	Distribution	Treatment	VSS	Total
Applications Received	25	21	2	48
Exams Failed	14	8	1	23
Exams Passed	11	13	1	25

Renewal

Rhode Island Operator Certification requires that an operator renew her/his full certification every three years. Renewal requires evidence of completed training credits, a completed application, and a signed affidavit attesting to the validity of information provided during the application process. Training credits are issued as training contact hours (TCH).

Contact Hours Required [(one (1) continuing education unit (CEU) equals ten (10) contact hours)]:

Two Year Renewal Period (OIT)	Three Year Renewal Period (Full)
Class VSS	3 hours
Class I	15 hours
Class II	15 hours
Class III	30 hours
Class IV	30 hours

Applicants must complete 50% or more of their required training contact hours in technical areas directly related to the operations of the water system employing them and may complete no more than 25% each, in the areas of health/safety and supervisory skills.

There were 256 license renewals for the reporting period.

Training

As noted in previous reports, state personnel provide only limited training. The state does provide extensive opportunities for training and exam preparation through contracts with industry vendors. The focus of our efforts in 2011 has been on utilizing these resources to develop sustainability within the water supplier community.

In order to accomplish this, the state has contracts with:

- Atlantic States Rural Water & Wastewater Association,
- New England Water Works Association,
- The University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension,
- The Louis Berger Group
- Cadmus Group Inc.

- Horsley Witten Group

Through these partnerships we have provided:

- technical assistance and one-on-one circuit rider assistance,
- individual and group training and operator certification assistance,
- small water system management guides,
- ICS/NIMS training, and,
- cross-connection control program guidance.

Personnel

There have been no changes to program staffing. Steven Boudreau, is the operator certification program manager. He manages the licensing, renewals, exam scheduling and proctoring, licensee correspondence, and compliance assurance tasks. In addition, he serves as staff assistant to the Operator Certification Board preparing meetings, recording and documenting the agenda, minutes, and decisions of the Board. He also provides applicant eligibility data to the board as well as preliminary course approvals for continuing education programs submitted to the Board.

Other Resources

The License 2000 database is utilized for the licensing of both drinking water operators and public water systems. The database is updated daily as data is collected on licensees, systems and compliance status. The database currently lists 489 systems. There are 600 certified operators holding 700 certifications.

Changes such as license renewal and issuance of new licenses made to the License 2000 database are reflected in real time on the state Licensee Lookup web page at:

<https://healthri.mylicense.com/Verification/>

Stakeholder Involvement

The Board

The Board established by section 23-65-2 of the Rhode Island General Laws, is comprised of seven (7) persons, including the director of the Department of Health, or his or her designee and six (6) members appointed by the Governor. Of the appointed members, one shall be a registered professional engineer engaged in the practice of water supply engineering, one shall be from a list of qualified operators of a publicly owned water supply treatment facility in the state which has been recommended by the executive committee of the Rhode Island Water Works Association, one shall be from a list of qualified directors of a water supply facility who has general supervisory authority for a water supply facility which has been recommended by the executive committee of the Rhode Island Water Works Association, one shall be a representative of a labor union, one shall be a representative of business or industry, and one shall be a residential consumer of water. The Board holds annual elections to name a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary. The current roster of board members is included in Appendix I (page 16).

The Board meets quarterly at locations throughout the state. In addition to regular meetings the Board meets for special sessions as required. General meetings are open meetings and the program manager is responsible for posting meeting agendas on the state website 72 hours prior to meeting dates. Meeting minutes are posted publicly within 30 days of each meeting.

Regular meetings of the board were held on the following dates:

- January 21, 2011
- March 18, 2011
- June 17, 2011
- November 22, 2011

A special meeting of the Board was held on September 22, 2011. This meeting was called to seek input from water system personnel regarding proposed regulation changes. As a result of the meeting the Board made additional changes to the draft proposal and submitted them to the department of Health for review. The review process is ongoing.

The Board does not maintain its own website. Exam dates, applications and training resources are available on-line through the Health website on the Office of Drinking Water Quality web pages located at <http://health.ri.gov/licenses/drinkingwater/>. Data is managed and updated by the program manager.

Expense Reimbursement Grant

The Operator Certification Expense Reimbursement Grant Program was implemented in Rhode Island in 2003. The program was funded with \$259,600. The grant term expired September 30, 2009 and all funds were expended. Training initiatives continue to be included in Health's work plan and are funded through SRF set-asides.

The Department does not directly reimburse operators for expenses related to training and exams. Instead, HEALTH provides training, exam preparation, and continuing education opportunities through the contracts discussed earlier in this report. Training is free of charge to the operators of small water systems serving populations under 3,300. Courses, workshops, and public information meetings available to operators included half-day, full-day, and multiple session trainings in such topics as:

- Customers, the most important part of your business
- The intersection of water utilities and town planning
- Sampling: understanding your results
- Water systems 101
- Legal responsibilities of board members
- Communicating with your customers: new school – old school
- Asset management and GIS mapping
- RI drinking water operator certification exam review
- Certification prep training
- Drinking water sampling procedures
- Applied math for operators
- Fundamentals of reading blueprints
- Pumps and pumping overview
- Water storage tanks operation and maintenance
- Practical chemistry knowledge to provide safe drinking water

- OSHA confined space entry
- Practical energy management for water utilities
- Preparing for and responding to customer water quality complaints

Implementation Schedule Update

The program has not had any significant modifications in the past 5 years. The state strives for 100% compliance and is focused on enforcement, replacement of superintendents in a timely fashion and improving examination pass/fail rates. The reduction in the number of grandfathered operators is mainly due to attrition and certification upgrades.

Appendix I

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