



**COLORADO**

**Water & Wastewater Facility  
Operators Certification Board**

Department of Public Health & Environment

## **Board Guidance 15-2**

# **Colorado Operator Certification Examination Guidance**

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## **Background**

The purpose of this guidance is to provide an explanation of the current practices applicable to the administration of water and wastewater facility operators certification examinations. The requirements for applying to take a certification examination are found in the Water and Wastewater Facility Operators Certification Board's Regulation 100, *Water and Wastewater Facility Operators Certification Requirements* (5 CCR 1003-2). The regulation is available on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's web site at [www.colorado.gov/cdphe](http://www.colorado.gov/cdphe).

For more information, please contact:

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## **Certification examinations offered**

Certification examinations are offered three times each year for all certification categories and levels. The locations of the examinations vary for the individual dates offered. Although examinations for all certification categories and levels are offered during each exam cycle, all categories and levels are not offered on each of the exam dates. Please contact OCPO for specific information regarding the upcoming exam cycle.

## **Examination applications**

### **Application deadlines**

Application deadlines are March 1, July 1 and November 1 each year. If a deadline falls on a weekend or an observed national holiday, the deadline is extended to the next business day.

The application deadlines specified are the dates the applications must be received in the OCPO office. Applications may be submitted by mail, fax or hand-delivery. Applicants who choose to submit applications by mail are strongly encouraged to mail the application well before the deadline to ensure that it is received in the OCPO office on time. Applications received after the deadline will not be processed; rather, the applicant will need to re-apply to take an examination in a later exam cycle.

On rare occasions, an issue has arisen where an applicant has mailed an application that has become lost in the mail. In such circumstances, the applicant may be allowed to take the examination, at the discretion of OCPO, if the applicant can document that the application was mailed in a timely manner.

### **Submitting the application**

Application forms and form instructions are available on OCPO's website. All application forms must be filled out completely. Incomplete application forms will not be processed.

Payment of the \$15.00 application fee and the \$45.00 examination fee (for a total of \$60.00) must accompany the application. If the application is not approved, the \$45.00 examination fee will be refunded upon written request after the examination cycle has been completed.

### **Review and notification of acceptance or rejection**

Approximately three weeks following the application deadline, the operator will receive an initial notification whether the certification examination application has been approved or disapproved.

If the application is approved, instructions will be provided regarding admission to the examination.

**Re-review of application:** If the application is disapproved, the operator may request a re-review of the application, including consideration of any clarifying information that the operator may choose to submit regarding the identified basis for disapproval. Any such request for re-review must be received by OCPO within two weeks of the date of the disapproval notification letter. All factual information supporting the application must be received with the re-review request.

The operator will receive notification of the results of a re-review approximately two weeks after such requests were due.

**Appeals to the Board:** If an application is still disapproved after re-review, the operator may appeal this determination to the board. Any such appeal must be received in the board's office within two weeks of the date of the second disapproval notification letter. The appeal must include a supporting explanation as to why the operator believes the disapproval is in error. It is expected that all information relevant to the application will have already been submitted. However, the Board, at its discretion, can consider new information that is relevant to the appeal. The Board will consider an exam application appeal at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

### **Experience requirements**

Section 100.9.8, Regulation 100, specifies the minimum experience requirements that apply for each certification level. Except as specified in section 100.9.9, Regulation 100, the required experience must be documented on the certification examination application for the application to be approved.

The experience relied upon does not have to be at the level of the exam applied for.

Consideration of the quality of experience is a matter for prospective employers when hiring certified operators.

### **Documenting experience**

If an operator holds a current certification at a particular level, it is assumed that the operator meets the requirements for testing for that certification. For example:

- There is a two-year minimum experience requirement for a Class C certificate. It is assumed that an operator with a Class C certificate who wishes to test for a higher level certification had at least one year of actual operating experience at the time of the previous certification because at least 50% of the two-year experience requirement must be met with actual operating experience.
- The operator could meet the three-year requirement to test at the Class B level by completing either of the following.

- Documenting an additional year of experience that occurred subsequent to the date of obtaining the Class C certificate.
- Documenting a combination of actual operating experience and education substitution obtained prior to and/or after issuance of the Class C certificate. This meets the three-year experience requirement to test at the Class B level.

#### **Experience cut-off date**

In accordance with section 100.9.4(e), Regulation 100, the examination application deadline will be used as the experience cut-off date in determining whether an operator has the required experience to take a certification examination

#### **“Part-time” experience**

For systems that require less than a full-time operator for proper operation, experience of operators who work less than half-time will be counted as half-time experience, and experience of operators who work half-time or more will be counted as full-time experience. For example, based on a 40 work week:

1. An operator averages 15 hours per week working at a facility for one year. The operator would accrue 6 months experience.
2. An operator works at several facilities averaging 30 hours per week total for one year. The operator would accrue one year experience.
3. An operator working half-time on water treatment and half-time on wastewater treatment during a four-year employment period would accrue two years experience in each category.

In calculating experience:

- No more than one year’s experience credit will be counted for employment during one calendar year.
- Experience credit for operation of a seasonal water or wastewater facility will be accrued only for that portion of the year during which the facility is in operation. For example, the facility is operational from May through September. The operator would accrue five months experience if working half-time or more.

The Board recognizes that the minimum experience requirements may be met by operators with a wide range of actual experience.

#### **On-site operating experience**

Any experience with the daily operational aspects of a facility that will directly impact the quality or quantity of drinking water, domestic or industrial wastewater effluent or treatment residuals will be considered to be “actual on-site operating experience”. Activities including, but not limited to, supervision, laboratory analysis, electronic system operation (SCADA), load control, or engineering are acceptable as qualifying experience if the applicant demonstrates that he/she is directly and routinely responsible for actual process control or system integrity decisions that may affect public health or the environment in the performance of these activities.

#### **Industrial wastewater treatment experience evaluation**

The following criteria are used to determine whether an applicant’s operational experience at a given industrial facility is acceptable toward meeting the minimum experience requirements of section 100.9.5, Regulation 100.

## Qualifying industrial experience for certification examination applications

- (1) Experience gained at industrial facilities that discharge directly to state waters under a Colorado Discharge Permit System (CDPS) permit or under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit.
- (2) Experience gained at out-of-state industrial facilities meeting equivalent criteria.
- (4) (3) Experience gained at industrial treatment facilities that discharge to a publicly-owned treatment works or another industrial treatment facility that discharges directly to state waters. Experience gained at industrial facilities discharging directly to state waters without a CDPS or NPDES permit but under another federal or state authority will be accepted as qualifying experience for purposes of certification examinations. An example of such a facility would be a site operating under the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act* (CERCLA) or *Resource Conservation and Recovery Act* (RCRA) authority.

### Entry level certification experience requirements

Applicants for Class D, Class 1 or Class S examinations must satisfy a one-month experience requirement to obtain certification. Unlike other certification levels, applicants may take the examination for these entry level certificates before accruing the necessary experience that is required for issuance of a certificate.

Experience may be accrued under the supervision of a certified operator in responsible charge through the successful completion of an approved training course which is designed to prepare the operator to operate Class D or Class 1 facilities. .

There is no experience required for issuance of a Class T certificate.

### Education substitute for experience

Education may be substituted for up to 50 percent of the experience requirement for all certificate levels other than the entry level certificates. Documentation of completion of the course work must be submitted with the certification examination application if an applicant is relying on education to meet a portion of the experience requirement. This can be an unofficial transcript from the applicable educational institution. Please review section 100.12.1, Regulation 100, for more information about this option.

Courses approved for training units may also qualify as education to substitute for up to 50 percent of the experience requirement. Training unit contact hours and experience equivalencies are outlined in section 100.12.2, Regulation 100. For example, 90 training units (900 contact hours of instruction) would be required to substitute for one year of experience. Contact OCPO for the form used for compiling and documenting use of training units as an experience substitute.

Although training units used for certification renewal must have been completed during the period of the operator's existing certification, training units do not "expire" for purposes of credit as an education substitute for experience.

## **Examination procedures**

For admission to an operator certification examination, an approved applicant must have the following:

- (1) A copy of their approved applicant notification letter.
- (2) State or federal government issued picture identification, i.e., valid driver's license, state-issued ID card or passport.
- (3) One or more #2 pencils.
- (4) A standard mathematical calculator.

Any calculations must be made on the exam booklet; no scratch paper is needed or permitted.

All persons must check in at registration no later than 12:00 noon on full-day testing dates and no later than 6:00 p.m. on Friday night testing dates to receive an exam. All tests will be collected at the specified finish time.

Examinees taking the "A" or "B" certification examinations frequently need five or six hours to complete the exam. For those taking an "A" or "B" exam, 30 minutes will be allowed for lunch; however, applicants must bring whatever they plan on eating to the exam, as they may not leave the immediate area for lunch. Three ten-minute breaks are generally allowed, with exams held by the proctors while the examinee is on break.

Cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Examinees are prohibited from having data transmission devices, including cell phones, in certification examination rooms. Examinees on call must notify the proctors, should the examinee need to return a call or answer a page they must do so in the presence of a proctor. Failure to comply with this policy may result in immediate exam revocation, and/or automatic exam failure.

## **Notification of examination results**

A list of examinees who have passed examinations is generally posted, by exam location, at [www.ocpoweb.com](http://www.ocpoweb.com) approximately four to five weeks following an exam date. Operators will be individually notified of the official results of a certification examination approximately six to eight weeks following an exam date.

Successful examinees receive notification of eligibility for certification. Instructions for applying for certification are included with the notification.

All examinees will receive:

- A summary analysis of their individual performance on the different topics tested.
- A statistical summary of the overall performance of examinees on the topics tested.

To maintain the integrity of the nationally standardized exams used, examinees are not able to review their individual exam responses.

## **Board members taking certification examinations**

Members of the Water and Wastewater Facility Operators Certification Board may take operator certification examinations while serving on the board in accordance with Board Policy 14-1.