

**Wastewater Operator Certification Program
Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes**

*November 5, 2008
Evergreen Rural Water of Washington*

Members:

Breshears, Willy	CH2M Hill OMI	X
Carlson, Todd	Pierce County Utilities	X
Carre, Poppy	Ecology WWTP OpCert. Program	X
Holmes, Tom	City of Snoqualmie	X
O'Neill, Andy	City of Pullman	X
Parker, Jill	Evergreen rural Water of Washington	X
Pelton, Tim	City of Spokane	X
Windh, DeAnna	Lakehaven Utility District	Absent
Glaser, Russ	Clark Public Utilities	X
Emmett, Kathleen	Ecology Water Quality Program	Absent
Wilson, Melinda	Ecology WWTP OpCert. Program	X
Guests		
Cheryl Bergener	Washington State – Dept. of Health	X
Judy Carter	Washington State – Dept of Health	X
Jim McCauley	Ecology, Water Quality Program	X
Rickertsen, Cheryl, Scribe	CH2M HILL OMI	X

The meeting opened by group; scribed joined at 10:40 am.

Opening

- 1) Poppy reviewed the exam stats.
 - a) There were 22 new operators applying for the October exam.
 - b) Number of Active Operators: 1972.

Certification Program Update

- 1) WW OpCert website receives over 1100 hits a month. Kudos section is working great – please look at it and update.
- 2) Poppy announced that after the December application deadline for the February exam, no more pencil and paper applications will be accepted. See pink sheet attached; this information was mailed with operator's renewal notice.
- 3) Changes to OpCert Program:
 - a) Stability of program update: At last meeting, it was reported that the program funding was very unstable, since that time there has been a new program manager and deputy program manager working on the budget; they rearranged job tasks for the program utilizing the funding available. Discussed Melinda's position; she was able to stay and the program is stable at this time.
 - i) Public Disclosure person is tasked with maintenance of filing system and has been very successful; system is organized at this time.
 - ii) Discussed WW Op Cert program budget timeline.

ABC Relevancy Update

Cheryl Bergener:

- 1) ABC has hired a new director, Paul Bishop. State members received a ballot and are looking at restructuring the board. Previously, the voting board members were the ones that attended the meetings – now all the committee chairs are board members even though they can not vote which means their travel costs are paid for. This became very costly as well as meetings became less productive with so many members present. The proposed restructuring would address this matter and not provide the travel funding.
- 2) ABC 2009 Conference will be Jan 19 – 23rd. in Palm Springs. All state travel has been frozen due to the economy and political status. This is a disappointment because Cheryl and Poppy have always benefited from attending. Q: can someone pay for Poppy and Cheryl's registration fee of \$400.00 plus expenses? A: Probably not. Down side of not attending is Washington will not be represented.
- 3) ABC Course List: Has it been adopted yet? A.: Not that Poppy is aware of; she will check.

Poppy Carre

- 1) Effective in the 2010 PGP, flagger, driver's training, and 1st Aid/CPR will no longer be accepted as relevant training.

Program Support Outreach

- 1) Tim spoke with the Land's council looking for support for the certification program. Per Poppy, right now is the best time to address the legislature. Tim will get his groups going and Tom will contact the lobbyists. Let them know how important it is to support the agency; address letters to chair legislation, the governor, and OFM (Office of Financial Management); (Karen Frazier and local legislator); copy Ecology. This would only affect the 2000 plus operators. The two roving operators that are funded by grants could go away – this would be where some of the funds would go towards. Until we find ways to even go forward, Ecology won't even look at it. The last time it was brought up to add permit fees at the municipal level, was stalled at the committee level with not enough of a positive response. Cheryl spoke that for their program, they are required to be fee supported. Tim will work with Washington Cities to get their buy-in. Todd will take the lead, Andy will be liaison for PNCWA, and Jill will support where needed. Email information to Todd by December 1st. Willy will send reminders out on the 15th of November. We want to send the message out to let them know how valuable the program is and so that it is self sustaining – open up the law to change the RCW so that there is not a fee cap. Andy wants a copy of the RCW and WAC. This certification system provides stable wages and job security. Right now the fees are going to the state general fund and we want them to go directly to the WW OpCert program to avoid being cut.

Professional Growth - Training: Relevant vs. Specific

- 1) Current professional growth period is for 2007, 2008, & 2009
- 2) Class attendees at Evergreen have increased
- 3) Discussed and reviewed course list. Specific is WW specific and relevant is relevant training. Poppy asked for attendees to go through the course list (*see attached*) and determine if it looks accurate; list is available only to committee members. Melinda and Poppy are asking for assistance. Ultimately, to convert the Ecology list into the ABC list. Todd would like to see this happen effective 2010. The responsibility would lie on the operator to ensure he/she is receiving the proper training.
 - a) Cheryl recommends that the committee make a "Relevancy" committee consisting of 3 people from the Advisory committee. The Relevancy committee determines if training is relevant, specific, or none; Poppy will have final say. Advisory committee agrees in advance to accept what the Relevancy committee majority decides. If the committee has a difficult decision, they will bring it before the Advisory committee for discussion.

- i) Motioned to create a committee, second. Tom, Jill, & Todd are on committee and will reply to Poppy's requests. Determination is based on the two definitions listed on the pink sheet with a one line explanation.
- ii) Bio solids
 - (1) Discussed Biosolids, specific or relevant? Group agreed that Biosolids are nowhere else besides a wastewater plant and a specific part of wastewater operation. **Biosolids** is a wastewater product and specific to their job.
- 4) Discussed if electrical training is relevant or specific. Group agreed relevant; Poppy will put this one in effect after December applications.
- 5) Relevancy committee will decide on future questions.

Reclaimed Water Certification – Jim McCauley, Ecology

- 1) Jim's group is working on a reclaimed water rule to have opened by 2010. It was given adequate staffing, 5 FTEs but 2 are vacant at this time. Currently there are 20 permitted systems; 7 are under construction, and 12 in design; it is forecasted to see more systems put in the works. Looking at not having specific reclaimed water, but have it referenced in WW. Questions are going both directions regarding training in the treatment area as well as the distribution of it.
 - a. Comments from the group:
 - i. Jill Parker feels it should be folded in as a part of the WW certification program as it exists now. Not in favor of endorsements because it limits operators of work opportunities. Would like to see it become a part of the testing criteria.
 - ii. Tim Pelton is currently trying 6 different technologies at his plant and agrees with Jill. It will create hardships if you have "special" endorsements.
 - iii. Tom and Todd represent the working operators. They feel that reclaimed water is very similar to drinking water rather than sewer. There needs to be a distribution and treatment aspect to the certification program. Have an endorsement at the least. It is a product that will be distributed in most cases to human contact; not just into a body of water. They feel it should copy all the standards of drinking water distribution.
 - 1. Jim asked about the current testing... if you go from secondary to tertiary. Does testing reflect this? The answer is yes.
 - 2. Pierce County is looking at taking treated effluent and creates a tertiary system off plant site that would go to the golf course near by.
 - 3. Cheryl commented that it always [historically] comes back as a WW issue. Recommends that Poppy's exam be a need to know. It may be a non-defensible test if it is included in the current WW exams.
 - 4. Andy O'Neil asked about other states; how are they approaching these issues? Jim was unsure – most are following the ABC exam.
 - 5. Todd has concern of endorsing or including in ABC test, we are only looking at a handful of questions that will be asked. That is why he would like to see it as a separate exam because there are so many different aspects of it and to ensure that there is a valid knowledge of the system.
 - 6. Tom agrees with Todd. Currently you have no certified operators paying attention to what is going on with it once it leaves the site.
 - 7. Willy struggles with filling vacant operator positions. Oregon has filtration and other endorsements. If it becomes mandated, he would recommend that it be an endorsement. It will then be very difficult to fill the open positions.

8. Cheryl offers that the committee can recommend that the training experience levels be clarified.
9. Tom suggests that new facilities may use the existing operators with a grace period for the experience requirements.
10. Todd believes that there needs to be some accountability. An endorsement would be issued to a person that isn't a WW operator, but does have the endorsement ensuring that someone is there to protect public health and performs sample collecting correctly.
11. Tom says you could have sewer distribution manager in charge of the reclaimed water system, but you cannot have a reclaimed water facility manager in charge of the wastewater facility.
12. Russ: If you are dealing with wastewater, you should be certified in wastewater. If you are dealing with distributed water, you should be certified in water -distribution.
13. Lacey is going to be using it all over – irrigating near Cabelas. Walla Walla's irrigates farm fields near by.
14. Poppy references that “we have to have an operator or an endorsement”, etc. is that going to be part of the rule Jim is putting together?
 - a. Jim suggests that possibly we could have a rule that would maybe include this.
 - b. Poppy asked if it was an endorsement need to be renewed.
15. Jim said there is a state committee that meets monthly. There is not operator representation at that group. Jim would like to invite committee member(s) to attend; arrangements will be via Poppy.
16. Discussions to add a WW Op level V. Looked at the plant requirements for a certain level operator; we don't want to discourage smaller plants from upgrading.
 - a. Jim would like a position paper submitted prior to the committee meeting.
17. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

Electronic Exam

- 1) Per Poppy, Applied Measurement Professionals (AMP) is the only vendor ABC approves. AMP is a national test provider and has exam sites available nationwide. Currently there are 2 sites in Spokane and one in Bellevue. Oregon has seven locations. AMP will add locations in Washington as we utilize their service. Testing candidates' application procedures will work the same. AMP will contact the operator to arrange time and place. The operator will pay the AMP testing service fee and ABC exam fee at that time. Testing will be available five days and week and one weekend a month. New Exam Fees are \$ 76 plus the following testing service fees; OP I - \$59, OP II - 76, OP III - 93, & OP IV - \$101. If candidate fails a test, they can retest approximately in one month.
 - a) Poppy is waiting for the final contract to be approved. When that happens, the letter will be prepared and the Dec. 15 application and new fees will be out there. First electronic exam will be offered June 2009.
 - b) Jill said that the exam review courses will still be offered quarterly. It will not be cost effective to give a class without a minimum of 10 – 15 people.

Roundtable

- 1) Tim: Don't drop the ball on the outreach program.

- 2) Tom: Q: What would it take to change some of the definitions in the WAC. A: The WAC is a rule change and costs approximately \$180,000.
 - a) When the RCW is opened, it will need to be reviewed thoroughly.
- 3) Jill: If any one has comments or suggestions on re-use program, please contact Jill, Tom, or Andy.
- 4) Russ: Will be retiring December 31st – will maintain certification.
- 5) Cheryl: Water certification program going to legislature to open a rule to look at backflow assembly tester program, to change the rule to give DOH authority to immediately suspend certifications of operators that are being investigated for falsifying records. They are looking at changes of water treatment plant operators that looks at BAT experience and how that equates to water treatment experience. Washington hasn't had major full level 4 treatment plant experience opportunity. Looking at if you are going for a 4 you have to work at a 3 for so long.
 - a) Electronic exams: Working on putting a policy for retakes. Exams will go out into effect in June. All operators will increase fees by 11%.
 - b) Water guidelines have been added.
 - c) Attorney directed, we'll no longer allow appeals for those who do not meet experience criteria. Exam deadline is February 5th.

Next Meeting: April – Willy will host and send out dates.

Meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m..