

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE
For Water and Wastewater Systems Operators
January 11, 2011
Meeting Minutes**

Advisory Committee Members Present

John Ackerman, Chairman
Sophie Simon, Vice Chairperson
David Smith
Jeffrey Culton
Doug Pike
Gary Witmeyer
David Eisenberger
Jesse Weiss
Michael Sienkiewicz
Darrel Hutchinson

DEP Employees Present

Nicki Kasi
Scott Sykes
Cheri Sansoni
Roberta Radel
Julianne Burke
Bill McNamara

Advisory Committee Members Absent

Mike Henry
Jeffrey Stahl
David Smith
Edward Gulick
Paul Zielinski
Barbara Canfield
Dale Runkle
Jerry Brown

Chairman John Ackerman called the Certification Program Advisory Committee (CPAC) meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. in Room 105 of the Rachel Carson State Office Building.

Approval of October 26, 2010 Minutes

Michael Sienkiewicz motioned to approve the October 26, 2010 meeting minutes. Jesse Weiss seconded. The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

External Program Review Report

Scott Sykes opened continuing discussion from the previous CPAC meeting of the five-year External Program Review Report being developed in compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requirements, and he asked for suggested changes to the document.

As a basis of the report, a survey was given to operators, exam providers, training providers and system owners regarding the efficiency of the Operator Certification Program, and Sykes reported that the survey results suggest that, overall, the program is running well. The major exception expressed in the survey was the lack of exams in 2010.

Regarding the review report's *Section D. Observations or Recommendations for Program Improvements*, Doug Pike expressed his desire as a training provider to be able to find an operator's certification status online. He also noted that the process of maintaining training and testing records for non-certified operators is inhibited by their lack of DEP Client IDs.

Bill McNamara, head of the Training Section and tasked with maintaining the Earthwise Academy website and catalogue of operator training courses, explained that the current inability to look up uncertified operators' training and certification status by Client ID is an information technology (IT) issue that can perhaps be dealt with in time. The decision not to track uncertified operators had been made because tracking them would tax the database. McNamara stated, however, that he would discuss the possibility again with IT personnel and would also investigate other options for verifying the status of non-certified operators. Additionally, Michael Sienkiewicz noted that survey respondents also expressed difficulty using the Department's eLibrary. No suggested changes to the program review report were made, however, relative to these issues.

One change was suggested for the report. It was proposed that the last two bulleted recommendations in Section D, page 14, be moved toward the beginning of the list and be made the second and third bullets on page 13.

David Smith motioned to approve the External Program Review document with the bullets moved. David Eisenberger seconded. The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

Letter to Secretary and Chairman of the Certification Board

As an extension of the program review, John Ackerman suggested that the committee be proactive and draft a letter to the incoming DEP Secretary and the Chairman of the Certification Board stressing the committee's concerns and future goals for the Certification Program.

It was agreed that the letter should emphasize the following concerns:

- Recognition of a lack of certified operators, an aging workforce that is retiring, and the need to bring younger operators into the field;
- Identifying the current backlog of operators needing to take exams;

- Increasing the program's output to former levels;
- The need for help in restoring the program;
- The necessity of retaining funding from the Safe Drinking Water Fund and the General Fund; and,
- The importance of the Certification Program to public health and safety.

Sophie Simon motioned to have Nicki Kasi write the letter and send it to the incoming Secretary and the Certification Board Chairman. John Ackerman seconded. Michael Sienkiewicz voted against the motion, due to a failure to include in the letter a proposal for the amount of funding needed. The motion carried.

Program Manual

The committee discussed changes and corrections to the program manual that Scott Sykes has been developing. They also discussed key points from the manual to emphasize during the certification program training that will be given to owners and operators in the spring and summer.

Mr. Sykes has been developing a large portion of the manual based upon questions received by operators and owners and questions frequently asked nationwide in the industry. He noted, however, that the document is too big to distribute directly to operators and suggested it be put online, also that it be a fluid, changeable document and well hyperlinked.

Key points to emphasize in training include:

- How to find the new program manual and use it;
- Requirements for certification and steps to becoming certified, an emphasis on the certificate application process, and clarification that passing the examinations does not automatically confer a certificate;
- Definition of a certified operator and clarification of who may make process control decisions and who may make day to day decisions following Standard Operating Procedures (SOP);
- Explanation of Operator-in-Training (OIT) status and the process of becoming an OIT;
- "Securing Drinking Water and Wastewater Treatment Facilities" continuing education course requirement:
 - What it is
 - If it must be taken more than once
 - If taking it prior to becoming certified still fulfills the requirement
- Overview of fees and an explanation of why operators are being charged;
- The importance of keeping contact information current;
- Examinations:
 - How the exams were developed
 - Why they are confidential
 - The process for revision
 - Need to Know Criteria

The following changes to the program manual were suggested by the committee:

- Change the title so that it is clear this is a guidance document; it does not replace wording in the regulations.
- Page 9, *Chapter 1, Introduction* – delete language in the first paragraph referring to the manual as a stand-alone document for the program.
- Pages 12-13, *Section C. Sources of Information* – add a list of common questions and identify who should be contacted.
- Page 14, *Chapter 2, Becoming a Certified Operator* – add language to the first paragraph emphasizing that simply passing exams does not automatically confer a certificate, and that certificates involve an application process.
- References to Track 1 and Track 2 training need to be in a consistent format, using either roman numerals or alphanumeric reference.
- Add a section on how operators can find their plant class size and subclasses.
- Page 16 – Fix typographical errors in Track 2 experience.
- Page 19, question 5 – eliminate reasons why detailed feedback on exam performance and failures is not yet available.
- Page 19, question 9 – clarify that a refund of the Approved Examination Provider’s (AEP) registration fee is at the discretion of the AEP. The committee may need to look at the Board Guidelines and the Approved Examination Providers’ manual and add language to the notification letter concerning a refund policy.
- Page 21, question 3 – clarify the question and correct the process of becoming an OIT to state that a letter verifying the required experience must come from the operator’s supervisor.
- Page 25 – move fees to the applicable sections (e.g., Chapter 3 should only include initial certification fees).
- Page 25 Section C, question 1 – emphasize the necessity to apply for a license in the first sentence.
- Page 26, question 1 – fix typographical error where “review” under bullet 5 is repeated.
- Chapter 4, Section D – add language to clarify that the security training must only be taken once for bi-operable operators, regardless of when they obtained the second license.
- Appendices – hide table grid lines, redesign so that columns A and B do not look related, and eliminate duplicate numbered items (i.e., re-label items as 5a and 5b, etc.).
- *Need to Know Criteria* tables in Appendix A – explain how to use these charts; delete wording with strikethroughs; break down the different knowledge, skills and abilities covered on each test into percentages of the total test questions; check that percentages all equal 100%.
- Emphasize that sample SOP templates and Operator Reports to the System Owner are examples only.
- Develop a template for an Owner Response Form.

- Page 113 – Develop suggested SOP disclaimer language, recognizing that operators cannot provide for every situation in a SOP and that in certain situations the operator must be contacted.
- *Appendix E, Process Control Plan* – delete appendix, move to DEP staff manual.
- Page 56 – delete reference to Appendix G and instead link to the full wastewater regulations; delete Appendix G.

The committee also elected to revisit several issues at a later meeting. They will look again at the need to put regional office contact information in the document and clarify under what circumstances it might be necessary to contact a regional office. If the committee decides to add that information to the manual, information should be given for specific contact people, not just general phone numbers.

The next committee meeting was scheduled for September 15, 2012. Depending upon availability, it will be held in either Room 105 of the Rachel Carson State Office Building or the 2nd Floor Training Room.

John Ackerman motioned to adjourn at 1:43 p.m. Michael Sienkiewicz seconded. Motioned carried.