

Oregon DEQ Wastewater System Operator Certification

“Answers to Frequently Asked Questions”

Who is required to be certified?

The system supervisor or principal system operator who makes the technical process and procedural decisions must be certified in collection or treatment system operation at a level equal or higher than the respective system classification as set by DEQ (I, II, III or IV). A shift or “on-call” supervisor of a Class II, III or IV system may be certified at one grade lower than the system classification.

What defines a system “Supervisor”?

For certification compliance, the operator to whom the system owner has designated the authority to establish and execute operational practices and procedure is the system supervisor. This operator must have full and active responsibility for the daily on-site technical operation of the wastewater treatment system or wastewater collection system. The supervising operator is not required to be on site at all times, but must be available to respond on-site at the request of the owner or any other operator.

Are engineers required to comply with operator certificate requirements?

Yes, if an engineer is to be the designated wastewater system operator or supervisor, he or she must be properly certified by DEQ.

My system is supervised by a DEQ certified operator. Does Oregon law require I certify?

No, certification would be voluntary in this case. Generally, operator personnel are not required to be certified if system operation is supervised by a properly certified operator. Employers may require certification as a condition of employment and many provide incentives for employees to certify and advance certification.

Is DEQ notified as to who the system operators or supervisors are?

Yes. Wastewater system owners may replace or re-designate certified operators at any time. A written notice of operator designation must be filed with the DEQ certification program within 30 days of any change. As allowed by rule, DEQ may grant a conditional time extension for compliance when an operator designation terminates unexpectedly.

How does an operator obtain a standard renewable certificate?

- ~ Qualify by meeting the education and experience requirements for the level of certification applied for, and
- ~ File a properly completed application with fees with the certification program office by the application deadline as may be required (see DEQ examination schedule), and
- ~ Achieve a passing score on the certification exam of 70% or higher.

What is a Provisional Grade I Certificate?

This is a non-renewable Grade I certificate issued for 12 months that enables on-the-job work experience under the guidance of a certified operator and may be used to comply with operator certificate requirements for Class I systems. While passing the Grade I test is not required, the test is scheduled. The test fee is paid at the time of provisional application.

What are the minimum education requirements for a certificate?

- HS diploma or equivalent, or GED certificate, for all grades.
- For Provisional Grade I, enrollment in, or completion of, a DEQ approved training program.
- For Grade IV wastewater treatment, one year “Post High School” education or training.
- Post High School education may reduce experience needed for certification (see options or paths to qualify). DEQ will give six months experience credit to qualify for a Grade I certificate for an Associate of Applied Science degree or equivalent in water or wastewater technology. One year of education/training may reduce experience by 12 months for Grade II and by 36 months for Grade III.
- System operation refresher classes are not required to sit for an exam, but are available and may be very helpful.

Note: DEQ rules allow up to four calendar months following the month of the exam for a candidate to complete required High School, GED, or post-high school education/training.

What is “Post High School” Education?

Each year of Post High School education is equal to 45 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), 450 contact hours, or 45 quarter or 30 semester hours of community college, college or university credit, any of which may be combined. DEQ will determine the relevancy and acceptance of professional, technical or academic education acquired through accredited programs such as conferences, seminars, correspondence or distance learning courses, armed services training, trade schools, community colleges, colleges or universities.

What experience is required before I can test for certification?

There are multiple paths at all grade levels (see Oregon Wastewater Operator Certification Requirements). Related field experience may satisfy up to 50% of time.

DEQ rules allow a candidate to test early subject to time limits established for the grade level. When testing early, a post-exam application and \$30 fee are required once qualifications are met. Failure of a candidate to meet certificate qualifications within the established time limits nullifies the exam.

Grade I – Must be gaining experience in the field or enrolled in a course of instruction. Grade I candidates have 36 months to qualify by experience after passing the test.

Grades II, III and IV – Must complete experience and/or education requirements specific to the certificate grade by the end of four calendar months following the month of the exam.

Grades III and IV, have a minimum system class experience requirement.

What is “operator” experience?

The routine on site performance of duties, tasks and responsibilities in the operation of a wastewater treatment or collection system is required. This term does not include officials, managers, engineers, and directors of public works or equivalent whose duties do not include actual "hands-on" operation or supervision on site of wastewater system facilities or operators.

How many hours of work experience is one year?

One year is 12 months full-time equivalent or about 2000 hours with further reduction to allow for longer periods of vacation or sick leave on a case-by-case basis. If a person is or was a relief, temporary, seasonal or student intern operator, time accrues by the day. Where a person has full-time operator duties and responsibilities with both water and wastewater system operation, DEQ may find full-time experience credit for wastewater is reasonable.

Is there an allowance for experience in a related field?

Yes. As allowed by rule, acceptable experience may include work in a related field (e.g. drinking water, industrial maintenance, laboratory, etc.). Related experience may be used to meet up to 50% of the qualifying experience requirement. For Grades III or IV, all candidates must meet a minimum specified system class operator experience (Class II or higher for Grade III and Class III or IV for Grade IV). Experience may be paid or voluntary (some restrictions apply) and can be claimed each time one makes an application.

How much experience do I need to go from a Grade I to a Grade II?

Prior certification is not required and DEQ looks at the total work history. The options are three years of qualifying operator experience or two years experience and one year of relevant post-high school education. DEQ will consider related experience as allowed by rule.

What exams are offered?

Eight standardized examinations are offered; Grades I, II, III and IV for wastewater collection and for treatment. Exams are closed-book with a time limit of three hours. Each exam contains 100 multiple-choice questions valued at one point, including those requiring problem solving and calculations. A passing score is 70 points or 70%. A Formula Sheet and Conversion Tables are included with each test. You may use a non-programmable calculator and you will have opportunity to comment on any number of questions and answers.

When are examinations scheduled?

Paper and pencil exams are scheduled at various locations state-wide at least twice each year, once in the spring and again in the fall (see the DEQ Examination Schedule). Exam scores are available in about 30 days. An applicant may also request a computer-based test year-round for an open-schedule fee of \$100, payable in addition to standard fees. Once DEQ determines eligibility, the computer-based test candidate will be notified by email and then proceed to schedule the test Monday through Saturday at one of nine locations around the state and over 170 nationwide. Computer tests are scored at the end of the session, so no waiting weeks for a pass or fail result. No additional fee is charged to accommodate a disability.

May I write two examinations at one time?

Yes. However, for DEQ-scheduled test dates, site and proctor logistics usually limit the available time to a total of four hours, which generally works for Grades I and II. Open schedule computer-based test are three hours each and may be scheduled on the same day subject to testing center availability.

May I apply for a higher grade certificate initially?

Yes. Persons are encouraged to apply for the highest level qualified.

What is required to maintain or renew a certificate?

- Timely completion every two years of 2.0 CEUs (20 hours) or equivalent college credit for education or training with direct application to the job tasks and required knowledge of a wastewater system operator.
- If you have a collection and a treatment certificate, you only need meet continuing education for one or 2.0 CEUs total.
- Payment of the renewal fee.

Note: Continued employment as an operator or Oregon residency is not required.

How do I get a course evaluated for a CEU?

Training instructors or sponsors should apply in advance for course evaluation to the Oregon Environmental Services Advisory Council (OESAC), PO Box 1704, Clackamas, OR 97015-1704. Phone/Fax: 503/698-8494 or email: info@oesac.org. See www.oesac.org.

DEQ may evaluate an applicant's past or proposed training for CEU equivalency; however it is the applicant's responsibility to provide DEQ with adequate proof of course content, letters, transcripts or other documentation demonstrating participation or course completion. Approved CEU courses list can be found on the website above; under CEUs lookup/by program/DEQ.

Is there reciprocity with other States?

A majority of certificate programs in other states accept Oregon examinations as equivalent. Oregon DEQ looks at the exam passed in the other state, and the applicant's education, experience and compliance, to determine Oregon certificate qualification. While a number of states and the Association of Boards of Certification have endorsed Oregon certificate standards, always inquire with the respective authority in advance of needing certification.

What are certification costs?

- ~ Application/exam fees payable to DEQ are Grade I single \$100, Grade I combined \$150, Grade II \$120, Grade III \$140 and Grade IV \$160. For a computer-based test add \$100.
- ~ Re-exam or re-schedule exam fee is \$50
- ~ Supplemental application fee for post-exam qualification is \$30, if applicable.
- ~ Two-year renewal fee is \$100 and covers one certificate or two.
- ~ Reinstatement fee for expired certificate(s) is \$75, payable in addition to the renewal fee.
- ~ Continuing education for certificate renewal varies from \$0 to as high as \$700.