Fact Sheet

Pathways to entry level Operator Certification for your community

DEQ knows that Oregon communities have challenges finding certified operators for their wastewater treatment and collection systems. This factsheet describes three different pathways to entry level certification and clarifies the requirements on experience and education for certification and the certification exam.

Operator in Training
This path is for applicants that do not meet the experience requirement for a Grade I certificate, but are otherwise qualified because they meet the education requirement and have completed a DEQ-approved training program. These applicants can take a Grade I Treatment or Collection examination and upon passing the exam, they are recognized as Operator-In-Training for 36 months. During the 36-month period, applicants should gain the necessary experience to submit a Post Exam Supplemental Application Form to receive their Grade I certificate.

Provisional Grade I Certificate
Qualified applicants can submit Provisional Grade I certificate application at any time. This 12-month non-renewable certificate enables applicants to get on-the-job experience. To qualify for a Provisional Grade I certificate, applicants must have a high school diploma or GED; be engaged in a DEQ-approved operator training program; and be supervised by a certified operator while on the job.

Passing the Grade I exam is not required to be provisionally certified. The provisional applicant will automatically be signed up to take the Grade I exam and will have one year to take the test once approved. Once an applicant passes the test and completes one year of experience, DEQ will issue the Grade I certificate.

Small Wastewater Systems Certificate
DEQ may issue a Small Wastewater System Operator certificate to an applicant who meets the education and experience requirements and has passed the Small Wastewater System certification exam. A wastewater system classified as a Small Wastewater System may be supervised solely by a small wastewater system certified operator.

Small Wastewater Systems Classification
A system less than 500 design population or less than 150 connections can contact their DEQ permit compliance person to be considered for Small Wastewater System reclassification.

Experience qualification
DEQ evaluates experience based on acceptable operating experience. Experience is evaluated on a case by case basis and the following may apply:

For Grade I certificate
• One year of part time or full time experience in routine performance of operator duties, tasks and responsibilities at a domestic wastewater collection or treatment system (includes operator intern or trainee). Part time experience is acceptable for operators working less than 40 hours a week as long as it is part of the operators’ regular duty.

• Associate of Applied Science degree in water quality technology or equivalent may substitute for 6 months experience.

• Partial credit for experience in a related field, as allowed by rule.

For Grade II-IV certification requirements, visit the operator certification program website.

Alternative formats
Alternative formats of this document can be made available. For more information call 503-229-5696, Portland, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696. Hearing-impaired persons may call 711.