
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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2010

Overview of Water System Operator Certification Program

History and Need

In 1974 Congress passed the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The goal of the SDWA was to improve the safety of public drinking water in the United States. When the SDWA was implemented it was recognized that operator competence was as important to providing safe, reliable drinking water as monitoring, facilities and equipment. Thus in 1979 the New Hampshire Legislature passed RSA 332:E, establishing the drinking water operator certification program. The legislation established a five-member advisory committee to oversee the program and authorized DES to develop qualifications, conditions and procedures for certifying drinking water system operators. The rules governing this program are Env-Dw 502. The rules offer substantially more detail than can be included in this document and can be accessed from the DES website at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/legal/rules/index.htm#drinking>.

Systems Requiring a Certified Operator

Community (residential systems) and non-transient, non-community public water systems (e.g., schools, day care centers, and workplaces) are required to have a certified operator. Transient, non-community public water systems (e.g., restaurants, motels and campgrounds) are not required to have a certified operator.

Categories of Certification

There are two certification categories in New Hampshire's drinking water operator certification program: distribution and treatment. Each category consists of five levels, grade IA being the least complex, to grade IV the most complex. The grade IA certification is typically for operating very small and simple water systems, serving residential developments, schools or workplace systems. The grade IA certificate combines both the treatment and distribution categories. Grades I through IV are for larger, more complex water systems. Treatment and distribution certificates are issued separately for Grades I through IV.

How to Become Certified

To become certified in New Hampshire, an individual must meet the education and experience requirements of the certification grade they are applying for and pass the certification examination with a grade of at least 70 percent.

- **Examination.** New Hampshire uses a standard examination prepared by the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) for grades I through IV; many states require this exam for the purpose of reciprocity. In contrast, the grade IA exam is New Hampshire-specific.
- **Education and Experience.** To qualify to sit for an examination the applicant must meet the experience and education requirements listed in Env-Dw 502.17-19. For example, grade IA certification requires a high school education or equivalent and six months experience. The experience requirement can be substituted if the applicant completes the "Small Water System Operator Training Course" offered by DES. Grade IV applicants need four years of education

beyond high school and six years of experience, three of which must be in charge experience at a grade III or better water system.

- **When Examinations are Held.** Examinations are generally held three times per year; typically in the spring, summer and fall. Please call DES for a current examination schedule. Applications and appropriate fees to take the examination **must be received 30 days prior to the examination date.**

Reciprocity

Although no formal reciprocity arrangements exist with other states, operators currently certified by other states may request New Hampshire certification by reciprocity. Each application is evaluated individually. To request reciprocity, applicants must submit a completed application, a brief explanation letter along with proof of education, experience and certification from other states. The applicant must also submit a copy of the current certification regulations from the state the applicant is certified in. The applicant's certification must be active at the time of application.

Cost of Certification

The application fee is \$50 per certification. This fee is non-refundable and must accompany the application. If you do not pass the exam, you may reapply to retake the examination for an additional \$50.

Certification Period

The water works operator certificates are issued for a period of two years beginning January 1 of even numbered years and ending December 31 of the odd numbered years. The fee for each treatment and/or distribution certification and the combined distribution/treatment grade IA is \$50. If you hold a treatment and distribution certificate in grades I through IV the fee is \$100 to renew both.

Continuing Education

In order to maintain certification, operators must obtain continuing education credits. The number of hours over each two-year certification period varies from five to 20 hours depending on certification grade. See Env-Dw 502.07-08 for the specific requirements.

Educational Courses

Educational opportunities in New Hampshire are offered by a variety of organizations. Training courses range from entry-level courses to specific topics. Contact DES or check the DES website for availability at http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/op_cert/categories/training.htm.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit our website at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/index.htm>. All of the bureau's fact sheets are on-line at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm>.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of August 2010. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.