

How to Become a Certified Operator in the State of Wisconsin



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Operator Certification Program
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What is a certified operator?

A "Certified Operator" is an individual who has met the requirements of Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 114, Subchapter I - Certification of Waterworks and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operators. A certified operator is issued a certificate by the DNR to operate one or more of the classifications of waterworks or wastewater treatment plants.

The Operator Certification Program was designed to ensure that waterworks and wastewater operators have adequate training to perform the necessary tasks at their facilities. Certified operators play an important role in protecting public health and the environment.

How to become a certified wastewater or waterworks operator:

In order to become certified, a person must pass one or more exams based on the type of certification they seek. The exam(s) the operator should take are dependent upon the class and subclass of the treatment plant at which he/she works, or would like to work. Prior education or experience is not required in order to take an exam, however, some classroom or online training is recommended. A list of training courses is available on the Operator Certification webpage.

Written certification exams are given twice annually (the first Wednesdays in May and November) at six locations across the state. Registration is required before taking an exam. Applications for the exams are available on the operator certification website two and a half months prior to the exam date. The application must be postmarked at least 28 days prior to the scheduled exam date. Any exam applications postmarked after the due date will be returned and the applicant will not be able to participate in the upcoming exam day.

Study guides, which are a valuable tool to help prepare for exams, can be downloaded at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – and by searching keywords “*Operator Certification*”.

A score of 75% or higher is a passing score on each exam. Applicants will receive notice of exam scores by mail approximately three to four weeks after the exam date. Applicants who have failed a written exam may apply for re-examination at the next scheduled exam by completing an application and paying the exam fee.

Wastewater operator

Wastewater treatment plants are assigned class codes from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest class. This plant class is based on a number of factors, including plant design flow, the number of treatment processes, permit effluent limits, and types of industries contributing wastewater.

Subclasses are also assigned to wastewater treatment plants which correspond to the processes used at the plant. Subclasses are designated by letters A through L. Wastewater processes that have certification exams are:

- A - Primary treatment
- B - Trickling filters and rotating biological contactors (RBC)
- C - Activated Sludge
- D - Stabilization ponds and aerated lagoons

- E - Disinfection
- F - Anaerobic digestion
- G - Mechanical sludge dewatering and treatment
- H - Filtration (tertiary)
- I - Phosphorus removal
- J - On-site laboratory testing
- K - Special - generally for treatment plants using chemical or physical treatment, or both
- L - Electroplating and metal finishing

Each plant must have a designated Operator-In-Charge certified at the plant class level and in the same subclasses as the processes used at the plant.

To become a certified wastewater operator for subclasses A through J the general exam (either introductory or advanced) and at least one subclass exam (introductory or advanced) must be passed.

Operators may take the general and subclass exams at either grade level. For example, operators may skip over the intro level exams by taking the advanced level exams.

Wastewater subclasses K & L do not require an operator to pass the general exam. The operator only needs to pass a subclass K or L exam to become certified, and one exam covers all grade levels.

When operators have passed a general and subclass exam (or K or L exam) they become an Operator-In-Training - Grade T. In order to move above a Grade T operators must have earned experience and have filled out an experience sheet then submitted the completed sheet to your regional coordinator. The coordinator will determine whether experience credit is approved or denied and notify operators either way. Experience forms are available on the Operator Certification forms page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”.

The requirements for wastewater operator certification for each grade are:

Grade T - Pass written introductory or advanced general exam and introductory or advanced subclass exam(s).

Grades 1 & 2 - Pass written introductory or advanced general exam and introductory or advanced subclass exam(s) and have one year of subclass specific experience for Grade 1 and two years of experience for Grade 2.

Grades 3 & 4 - Pass written advanced general exam and advanced subclass exam(s) and have three years of experience for Grade 3 and four years of experience for Grade 4.

Waterworks operator

All publicly owned waterworks are required to have a certified operator and are assigned a Grade of 1. Waterworks subclasses which correspond to the processes used are also assigned by letters as follows:

- G - Groundwater - utilizing a groundwater source
- Z - Zeolite Softening - provides zeolite softening
- I - Iron Removal - providing iron removal by oxidation and filtration
- L - Lime Softening - providing treatment by lime-soda ash process
- S - Surface Water - utilizing a surface water source
- D - Distribution - containing a distribution system
- V - VOC - providing special treatment such as, but not limited to, air stripping, granular activated carbon or others

The requirements for waterworks operator certification for each grade are:

Grade T - Passing waterworks subclass exam(s).

Grade 1 - One year of satisfactory experience in the operation of a waterworks plant subclass(es), and passing the appropriate subclass exam(s).

Each plant must have a designated Operator-In-Charge certified in the appropriate subclasses for the processes used at the plant.

Class S waterworks facilities must have an operator certified at Grade T or Grade 1 on duty at all times of operation.

Certificates

An operator is issued a certificate when he/she becomes certified. This certificate specifies the grade and subclasses the operator has earned, and also indicates the month and year that the certification will expire (three years from issuance). All certifications expire on the first day of the month. Certificates are issued approximately four weeks after the date of the certification exam.

Fees for certification are as follows:

- Each written examination - \$25.00
- Three year renewal fee - \$45.00
- Late renewal penalty - \$25.00

How do operators add operating experience credited to their record?

To apply for operational experience (1, 2, 3 or 4 years for wastewater, 1 year for waterworks), operators must complete the Operator Certification Experience Form (Form 3400-66) which is available on the Operator Certification webpage. Experience forms may be filled out any time of the year that operators have acquired another year of experience. (Note for wastewater operators: The first year of experience is subclass specific. The second, third and fourth year are general wastewater operational experience.) Some operators take more than one year to acquire one year of experience because they don't work full time in the given processes. Any time an operator has acquired approximately 1,500 hours of experience in a subclass they have not been given credit for, operators may fill out the experience form and send it to their regional

certification coordinator so they may verify the experience and credit the operator's record. It is important to be complete and specific in describing operational tasks on the experience form. The review and approval of experience occurs in the region office (please see the last page of this document for your region's mailing address).

How do operators renew their certification?

Operators are required to earn continuing education credits to maintain an active certification. This continuing education requirement is designed to help operators keep current on new requirements and technical innovations. Continuing education also helps operators acquire additional knowledge and skills.

Certifications must be renewed every three years. Operators may refer to their certificate for the expiration date of the certification, or look up their certification status on the Operator Certification Lookup Website (<http://dnr.wi.gov/regulations/opcert/>). The number of continuing education hours required is as follows:

Wastewater operators

- Grade T, 1, and 2 require 18 hours
- Grades 3 and 4 require 24 hours

Water Supply Operators

- 18 hours
- Surface water operators, who are designated Operator-In-Charge, are required to have 24 hours of continuing education

The continuing education requirements may be obtained in a number of different ways including attendance at professional organization meetings, waterworks and wastewater related courses, EPA and DNR training courses, state and national conferences (i.e. AWWA or WEF), in-house and self-study courses, and courses offered by technical schools, universities, etc. Credit for courses is determined by the following criteria:

1. Each hour spent in course learning constitutes one credit hour of continuing education credit. Breaks and lunch do not count towards hours of credit.
2. Accredited courses at technical schools or universities - 1 CEU (Continuing Educational Unit) is equal to 10 hours continuing education credit.
3. Attendance at the entire course and successful completion of the course is required to receive full credit.
4. A maximum of six hours health and safety related training may be used per renewal period. Examples of health and safety related training include first aid/CPR, confined space entry, excavation safety, personal protective equipment, Hazwoper, and bloodborne pathogens.
5. Credits must be earned in the three year period prior to the operator's expiration date. (i.e. if July 1, 2014 is the expiration date, credits must be earned between July 1, 2011 and July 1, 2014 to be valid for your renewal on July 1, 2014.) Extra credits do not carry over to the next renewal period.

Training providers will provide attendance rosters directly to the DNR for any pre-approved training. Operators must sign out of trainings to ensure they are credited for the hours. If operators do not sign out of a training that they attend, they will only receive half of the credits.

An Operator Training Report Form 4400-190 is available for any relevant training that was not pre-approved by the Wisconsin DNR, such as out-of-state training or in-house safety training.

Operators can keep track of their training history by going to the Operator Certification Lookup Website (<http://dnr.wi.gov/regulations/opcert/>) and searching by name or certification number. The Training History Report will display all trainings that have been credited to the operator's record.

Six weeks before a certification expires, operators should receive a courtesy renewal letter (regional coordinators should be notified of any change in address). This letter serves as a courtesy reminder only. It is the responsibility of an operator to keep track of their certification expiration date. When operators are ready to renew they should mail their renewal letter, signed Training History Report, and the \$45 renewal fee to the Operator Certification Program.

If operators have not accumulated the correct number of credit hours per renewal period, the renewal packet should not be sent in until the credits have been obtained. Once an operator has obtained the correct number of credits, they may mail in their renewal packet with the \$70 fee (\$45 renewal fee and \$25 late fee). Once a certificate expires, operators have one year from the expiration date to reinstate their lapsed certification. **Operators are NOT considered certified during this lapse of certification.** If a certification is not renewed within a one year time period, an operator will need to re-take the written exams as a new operator.

Comparable Certification (reciprocity)

If an operator has a current wastewater and/or waterworks certificate from another state and are interested in applying for reciprocity to Wisconsin's Operator Certification program, they may request a reciprocity application by contacting Lisa Bushby at 608-266-0498 or Lisa.Bushby@Wisconsin.gov.

The comparable review certification fee is \$100 per certificate. The verification and review process may take 1-3 months.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why am I still at a Grade T - I passed the exams?

Grade levels are computed as a combination of passed exams and credited experience. Once you have accumulated at least one year of experience, submit an experience form and, if approved, your grade level will be upgraded.

Why am I not a certified wastewater operator? - I passed a subclass exam.

You need to pass **BOTH** a General and a subclass exam to become certified. This applies to wastewater operators seeking certification in subclasses A through J. There is no requirement to take a general exam for subclasses K & L.

When should I send in my Operator Certification Experience Form?

Whenever you have one year of experience that has not been credited to your record, complete the experience form and return it to your regional coordinator. Experience forms are available on the Operator Certification Forms page <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or you may contact your regional coordinator for a form.

How do I get an exam application?

An exam application will be sent (2 1/2 months prior to the upcoming exam date) to operators that have taken an exam in the last year and a half. An operator who has not taken an exam in the last year and a half, may contact their regional coordinator for an application. New operators may download an application from the forms page at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”, or contact their regional coordinator

Do you have any materials to help me study for exams? (Where do I get a study guide?)

Study guides are available online at <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”.

When will I be notified if I pass/fail an exam?

About three weeks after the exam date you will receive exam results in the mail. A list of missed objectives is printed out on your exam results letter. Refer to your study guide objectives to determine what areas of the exam gave you problems. If you pass the exam(s) you took, you will also receive the appropriate certificate.

Why didn't you send me a renewal notice?

We send renewal notices six weeks prior to the renewal date to the address we have on file. Maybe we don't have your current address? Check with your regional coordinator to see if we have your current address.

When should I renew my certification?

After you have received the renewal reminder letter that is mailed six weeks prior to your expiration date, mail in your renewal reminder letter, signed Training History Report, and the appropriate fee before the expiration date on your certificate.

What do I do if I don't have enough CEC's to renew my certificate and my certification expires?

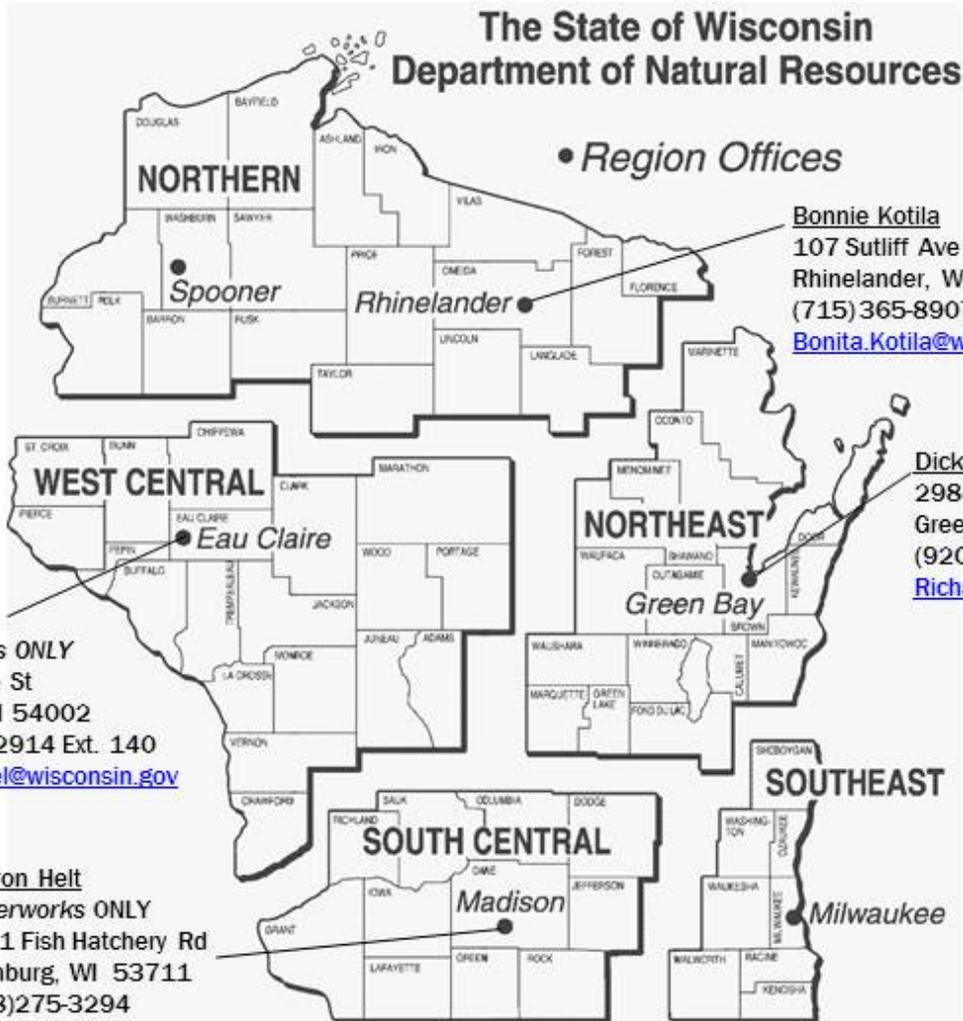
Send in the required continuing education documentation when you have accumulated enough credits and a \$70 fee (\$45 renewal fee and \$25 penalty fee) to the department to get your certification renewed. You have one year after the expiration of your certificate to renew. If you do not renew your certification within that one year period, your operator record will be deleted and you will have to retake all exams.

What classes can I take to earn CEC's?

For a current list of training events, view the training calendar on the DNR website <http://dnr.wi.gov> – keywords “*Operator Certification*”.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Waterworks & Wastewater Operator Certification Regional Coordinators



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Wastewater and Waterworks Operators within the Southeastern Region, and
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For general questions, e-mail the Operator Certification Mailbox at:
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