



# Wastewater Operator Certification

## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

### How does an operator obtain a wastewater certificate?

1. Qualify by meeting the education and experience requirements for the level of certification.
2. Submit a *complete* application with fees through [Your DEQ Online](#) that clearly documents that the applicant meets the education and experience requirements.
3. Pass the ABC national standardized exam with a score of 70% or higher.

### Where is my pending application, certificate, or validation fact sheet — *what is the status?*

**Processing timeline:** Based upon the program's current staffing levels, applications and certificate issuance is approximately four weeks or 30 days from when it is received at DEQ. If you have not received anything from DEQ within about five weeks or 35 days, please contact our office to confirm receipt of your application.

**New Applications for the exam:** When you are found eligible for the exam, you will receive an email at the email address listed in your application notifying you of the next steps to self-schedule your exam. This is usually about four weeks from when your application was received at DEQ. If there is an eligibility issue with your application, DEQ will notify you by email with a "Send Back Reason" in your Your DEQ Online portal for the items that needing revision and a deadline for resubmitting the application.

**Certificates:** If you have passed the exam and your certificate has been issued (issuance of the certificates is approximately four weeks following your exam), your new license number can be found ahead of receiving your certificate on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#), under the Certification Database section. The database results are real-time.

**Validation Fact Sheets:** The Fact Sheet is a downloadable PDF, which you can access in Your DEQ Online in the Permits / License / Certificate ("PLC") module, designated by a small blue icon with the letter "i" in a square. For steps to open and view it, see our web document: "[Fact Sheet: How to View Your Certificate Validation](#)". It displays current expiration date, issuance date, etc. and replaces the blue "validation card" previously mailed after new certification or renewal.

**Renewal of Certificate(s):** Based upon the high volume of renewal applications our staff review each winter and summer, processing times for renewal applications regularly exceed 30 days. In order to ensure your certificate is renewed prior to the expiration date, we recommend you submit the complete renewal application form through Your DEQ Online promptly. You will receive an "application approved" email, and you can view the new expiration date (that confirms a successful renewal has occurred) within Your DEQ Online account in the "PLC" module. It can also be viewed on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#), under the Certification Database section. The database results are real-time. If we encounter an issue with your renewal, we will send you a

formal “Send Back” message in your portal (in the “edit” application view), that explains the steps for revision and resubmittal.

## What are the certification fees?

Fees range from \$50 - \$340, based on the service you select. Please see the [Operator Certification Fee Table](#) for a complete listing of each service and its fee. Upon selection of your exam type and grade in the online application, or renewal, the corresponding fee will be displayed in the Payment tab.

**Refunds:** In most cases application review fees are **non-refundable**.

## How and when are examinations scheduled?

The Associated Boards of Certification (ABC) computer-based exams are available in Oregon year-round and up to six days per week. An email address is required for all exam applicants. Upon being found eligible for the exam, DEQ will email an approval notification to the applicant with instructions on how to self-schedule the time and location of the exam. Computer tests are automatically scored at the end of the exam and a printed exam content mastery summary report is also provided. For additional exam information, please see the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “Exam information.”

## What exams are offered?

Nine national ABC standardized examinations are offered: Small Wastewater System (SWWS) and grades I, II, III and IV for wastewater collection and treatment. Exams are closed-book with a time limit of three hours. Each exam contains 100 scored multiple-choice questions valued at one point, including those requiring problem solving and calculations. A passing score is 70 points or 70%.

The eight-page ABC Formula/Conversion Table for Wastewater Exams document is available at the exam site. The same document is also posted on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) in the “Exam information” section and on the Water Professionals International (WPI or ABC) [website](#). You may use a non-programmable calculator. Exam scoring is computer automated, and it cannot be adjusted or contested.

## May I apply for two examinations at the same time?

Yes. Computer-based tests are each three hours in length and may be scheduled on the same day subject to testing center availability.

## May I apply for a higher grade certificate without holding a lower grade certificate?

Yes. Persons may apply for any grade certificate *for which they meet the education and experience requirements*. Holding a wastewater certificate in Oregon is not a requirement for obtaining certification at any grade (level).

## What is an Operator in Training (OIT)?

An applicant that does not meet the 12-month Grade I certificate experience requirement, but is otherwise qualified by education and has completed a DEQ-approved training program, may take a Grade I Treatment or Collection examination. Please see [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “DEQ-approved training.” Upon passing the exam, the applicant is recognized as an Operator-In-Training for 36 months. During the 36-month period, the applicant must meet the experience requirements for the standard Grade I or Provisional certificate.

## 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. While passing the Grade I test is not required to receive a 12-month Provisional certificate, the applicant is still approved for the exam, with a waiver for experience similar to OIT (see above). This temporary waiver for experience is made possible by attaching documentation of a DEQ-approved training program to the application (see [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “DEQ-approved training”). The Grade I test fee included with the provisional application is the same as for other Grade I applications.

## What is required to maintain and renew a certificate?

1. A properly completed renewal online submittal, with fee payment, and complete, legible Continuing Education Unit (CEU) certificate attachments.
2. Timely completion every two years of 2.0 CEUs, or more, and approved by the **Oregon Environmental Services Council** (“OESAC”) as wastewater topics.
3. College transcript credit hours of DEQ pre-approved college/university educational coursework. OESAC approved CEU courses can be found on the [Council's website](#) with a four-digit approval code and a listing for the amount of “ww CEUs” in the vertical column of the webpage next to the course (“ww CEUs” indicates wastewater CEUs). Academic/education courses require DEQ pre-approval by submitting the course, anticipated attendance date and course description to ensure that the academic course will be accepted by DEQ for certificate renewal.

DEQ mails the two-year Renewal Notices to the operator’s mailing address on record as entered in your YDO user account, at least 60 days prior to the expiration date. The notice describes the process for online renewal and other renewal requirements. DEQ does not process renewal submissions prior to the three-month window preceding your expiration date. For example, starting in April for June expiration dates and October for December expiration dates.

If you have a collection *and* a treatment certificate, 2.0 wastewater approved CEUs is sufficient to renew both certificates at one time, and the fee is the same for renewing one or two certificates.

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

For additional certificate renewal information, see the “Operator Certificate Renewal FAQ” on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled “Program information.”

## How do courses get evaluated for Continuing Education Unit (CEU) approval?

**CEU courses:** Training instructors or sponsors must apply for course evaluation to the Oregon Environmental Services Advisory Council (OESAC), PO Box 577, Canby, OR 97013-0577. Phone/fax: 503/698-6486 or email: [info@oesac.org](mailto:info@oesac.org). See <http://www.oesac.com/index.aspx>.

It is up to the CEU course sponsor/instructor to submit the CEU course with review fees to the OESAC Council for review and approval.

**Academic Transcript Courses (non-CEU):** Academic/education courses require DEQ pre-approval in advance of enrollment of the course by submitting the course name, anticipated attendance date(s) and course description to DEQ to ensure that the academic course will be accepted by DEQ at the time of certificate renewal. After completion of the course, attach to your renewal form:

1. A copy of the transcript showing successful completion of the course; **and**
2. The original email from DEQ that provided pre-approval to attend the course for the purpose of renewing your wastewater certificate.

## What is “post-high school” education?

Each year of post-high school education is equal to 45 CEUs, or 45 quarter or 30 semester hours of community college, college or university credit, any of which may be combined. DEQ will determine through review of transcripts or equivalent course specific documentation if the academic courses and training received at a college or university are relevant to wastewater operators. CEU courses must be awarded as wastewater CEUs and should be approved by the [Oregon Environmental Services Advisory Council \(OESAC\)](#) as identified by an OESAC course four-digit ID number. Post-high school credits are only counted in one-year increments, e.g. 45, 90, 135, and 180 credits.

## What experience is required before I can test for certification?

There are multiple paths at all grade levels. See the Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) [340-049-0030](#) for full text, and see the [Pathway Qualification Tables for Collection and Treatment PDF](#) on the Wastewater Operator Certification Program [webpage](#) for details of all education and experience combinations that allow for wastewater certification.

Related field experience may satisfy no more than 50% of the total experience requirement for certification. Example: for a collection certificate, the percent of time worked with the wastewater collection system is considered “direct” experience. This direct experience must comprise 50 or more percent of the experience total. The remainder of the experience total for a collection certificate can be comprised of “related” experience in wastewater treatment, drinking water or wastewater laboratory. For a full list of allowable related experience types see OAR [340-049-0030\(5\)\(c\)](#).

## 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. Acceptable operating experience credit includes performance of operator or supervisor duties, tasks and responsibilities. Operator-in-training or student intern experience may satisfy up to 100% of acceptable experience.

## **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 unpaid (some restrictions apply) and can be claimed each time one submits an application.

## **How much experience do I need to upgrade from Grade I to Grade II?**

An applicant does not need to have a prior certificate in order to apply for any grade of wastewater certification. However, all applicants must meet the education and experience requirements for the certificate type and grade for which they choose to apply.

## **Is there reciprocity with other States?**

Oregon *does not* have direct exchange type of reciprocity agreement with any other state or province. *However*, the Oregon Administrative Rules 340-049-0050 *do allow* DEQ to review reciprocity applications from *individual persons* who hold active wastewater operator certificates in other states or provinces. Since other states may not require the national ABC certification exam for certification as Oregon requires, this may prevent an applicant for applying for certification through reciprocity at the same grade as their current, non-Oregon certificate. If you have questions regarding reciprocity eligibility, please call 503-229-5349 or email us at [opcert@deq.oregon.gov](mailto:opcert@deq.oregon.gov).

## **Who is required to be certified?**

The system's "designated" 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 (Small Wastewater System, 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 procedures 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.

## **Are engineers required to comply with operator certificate requirements?**

Yes, if an engineer is the designated wastewater system operator or supervisor, the engineer 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 by submitting the Designation for Supervisory Operator on Your DEQ Online. An updated submittal of operator designation must be filed with the DEQ certification program within 30 days of any change. DEQ may grant a conditional time extension for compliance when an operator designation terminates unexpectedly.

## **What are the minimum education requirements for a certificate?**

- High School diploma or equivalent, or GED certificate, required for all.
- For a Grade IV wastewater treatment certificate, a minimum of one year “post-high school” education or training (CEUs and/or college credits) is also required.
- For a Provisional Grade I certificate, enrollment in, or completion of, a DEQ-approved training program.
- Post-high school education may reduce experience needed for certification (see [Pathway Qualification Tables for Collection and Treatment](#)). DEQ will give six months of 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 or training may reduce required experience by 12 months for Grade II and by 36 months for Grade III.
- System operation refresher classes are not required to take an exam but may be very helpful.

## **Contact**

For questions, please contact the Wastewater Operator Certification Program by email at [opcert@deq.oregon.gov](mailto:opcert@deq.oregon.gov) or by phone at 503-229-5349.

## **Translation or other formats**

[Español](#) | [한국어](#) | [繁體中文](#) | [Русский](#) | [Tiếng Việt](#) | [العربية](#)

800-452-4011 | TTY: 711 | [deqinfo@deq.oregon.gov](mailto:deqinfo@deq.oregon.gov)

## **Non-discrimination statement**

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