



State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Pathways to Entry Level Operator Certification for Your Community

Wastewater System Operator Certification Program
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DEQ knows that Oregon communities have challenges finding certified operators for their domestic 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.

Path 1: Operator in Training

This path is for applicants who do not meet the experience requirement for a Grade I certificate, but are otherwise qualified because they meet the education requirement of being enrolled in or have completed a DEQ-approved training program, in addition to having a high school diploma or GED. These applicants can take a Grade I Collection and/or Treatment examination. Upon passing the exam, they are recognized as an Operator in Training (“OIT”). They have 3 years (36 months) to gain the necessary 1 year of qualifying experience. Upon gaining the 1 year or more of acceptable operator experience in domestic wastewater collection and/or treatment, they must submit a post-examination (“Application for Post-Exam Supplemental Experience and Education”) application and fee for evaluation of qualification for the standard Grade I certification. If the applicant does not submit a post-exam application within the 36 month period, the scores expire, and the applicant must re-apply with a new exam application.

Path 2: Provisional Grade I Certificate

A Provisional Grade I certificate is an optional certificate available to new operators who meet the following requirements: 1) are currently gaining acceptable operating experience at a wastewater collection and/or treatment system; 2) have a high school diploma or GED; 3) are enrolled in or have completed a DEQ-approved training program; 4) are being supervised by a certified operator. This is a 12-month non-renewable certificate.

Passing the Grade I exam is not required to be provisionally certified. Possessing a Provisional Certificate is not required for gaining on-the-job operator experience, as long as the worker is working under a certified supervising operator. The provisional applicant will automatically be enrolled to take the Grade I exam and will have one year to take the test once approved. Like the Operator in Training path, once the 1 year or more of acceptable operator experience in domestic wastewater collection and/or treatment is gained, they must submit a post-examination (“Post-Exam Supplemental Application”) application and fee for evaluation of qualification for the standard Grade I certification.

Path 3: Small Wastewater Systems Certificate (SWWS)

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 by DEQ 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.

Qualifying Experience

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

➤ **For SWWS and 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 generally acceptable for operators working less than 40 hours a week if it is part of the operators' regular duty.
- Associate of Applied Science degree in (DEQ-approved) water quality technology or equivalent may substitute for 6 months experience.
- Credit for experience in a related field, may substitute for some operator experience, as allowed by rule.

➤ **For Grade II-IV Certificate**

Visit the operator certification program website at:

<https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/wqpermits/Pages/Wastewater-Operator-Certification.aspx> for more on Grade II-IV certification requirements.