

Oregon DEQ

Wastewater System Operator Certification

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ



How does an operator obtain a wastewater certificate?

1. Qualify by meeting the education and experience requirements for the level of certification, *and*
2. Mail a *complete* application with fees to the DEQ certification program that clearly documents that the applicant meets the education and experience requirements, *and*
3. Pass the ABC national standardized exam with a score of 70% or higher

Where is my pending application, certificate, or validation card—*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 our DEQ office within about five weeks or 35 days, please contact our office to confirm receipt of your application. If the banking institution from which the check was written indicates the check has been cashed by DEQ, then this is confirmation of receipt of your application at DEQ. Note: if the banking institution indicates the check has been cashed, this means it has been received at the DEQ accounting office (payment is upfront/first), after which it gets routed to our certification office for review and processing.

New Applications for the exam: When you are found eligible for the exam, you will receive an email at the email address you 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 formal letter or email you with the items that need to be revised and a deadline for resubmitting the application.

Certificates: If you have passed the exam and your certificate has been issued (issuance and mailing of the certificates is approximately 4 weeks following your exam), your new license number can be found ahead of receiving your certificate on our [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#), under the Certification Database section. The database results are real-time.

Renewals/Validation Cards: 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 sending in the renewal form within the first 1-2 weeks of when it was received. Your new expiration date (that confirms a successful renewal has occurred) can be found [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#), under the Certification Database section. If we encounter an issue with your renewal, we will send you a formal notification that explains the steps for revision and resubmittal. The database results are real-time.

What are the certification fees?

- Please see the application forms for current application review and exam fees. All forms with the exception of renewal application (\$160 fee) can be found on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “Forms and Documents.”

- Reinstatement fee (late renewal additional fee) for expired certificate(s) is \$120. This reinstatement fee is required *in addition* to the renewal fee.
- Refunds: In most cases application review fees are non-refundable. Each application form has payment address.

How and when are examinations scheduled?

The ABC computer-based exam is 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, our DEQ office will send an email notification to the applicant's email address with instructions for how the applicant will be able to self-schedule the time and location of the exam. Computer tests are automatically scored at the end of the exam and the 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 for treatment. Exams are closed-book with a time limit of three hours. Each exam contains 100 multiple-choice questions valued at one point, including those requiring problem solving and calculations. A passing score is 70 points or 70%. The ABC Formula/Conversion Table sheet is provided at the exam site. 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 made eligible for the exam with a waiver for experience in the same was an OIT (see above). This temporary waiver for experience is made possible

through attaching documentation of a DEQ approved training program to the application (see [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “DEQ Approved Training.”)

The test fee is paid upfront—at the time of the provisional application.

What is required to maintain and renew a certificate?

1. A properly completed renewal form, including fee payment, and legible Continuing Education Unit (CEU) certificates copies.
2. Timely completion every two years of 2.0 [OESAC Council](#) wastewater approved CEUs *or* 2.0 college transcript credit hours of DEQ *pre-approved* college/university educational coursework. [OESAC Council](#) 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 in order to ensure that the academic course will be accepted by DEQ for certificate renewal.
 - *Note 1:* DEQ mails out the renewal forms to the operator’s address on record, at least 60 days prior to the expiration date. *US Postal Service address change service does not update an operator’s DEQ mailing address—call 503-229-5161 to update your address or email opcert@deq.state.or.us.*
 - *Note 2:* If you have a collection *and* a treatment certificate, 2.0 wastewater approved CEUs is equally sufficient to renew both certificates at one time.
 - *Note 3:* Continued employment as an operator or Oregon residency is not required.
 - *Note 4:* For additional certificate renewal information, see on the “Operator 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. 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, anticipated attendance date, and course description to DEQ in order 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 our office that provided preapproval 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 Continuing Education Units (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 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.

What experience is required before I can test for certification?

There are multiple paths at all grade levels (see Oregon Wastewater Operator Certification Requirements). 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, and wastewater laboratory. For a full list of allowable related experience types see [340-049-0030\(5\)\(c\)](https://www.oregon.gov/DEQ/REGISTRATION/Pages/340-049-0030(5)(c).aspx).

Please see [Application Additional Instructions Tables 1 and 2](#) for a detailed listing of all education and experience combinations that allow for wastewater certification.

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 trainee or student intern 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 voluntary (some restrictions apply) and can be claimed each time one makes an application.

How much experience do I need to go from a Grade I to a 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 refer to the Reciprocity Application Form found on the [DEQ wastewater certification program website](#) section titled, “Forms and Documents.” If you have further questions please call 503-229-5161 or email us at opcort@deq.state.or.us.

Who is required to be certified?

The system 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 to be the designated wastewater system operator or supervisor, he or she 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. A written notice of operator designation must be filed with the DEQ certification program within 30 days of any change. As allowed by rule, 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, for all grades except Treatment Grade IV.
- For Grade IV wastewater treatment, one year “Post-High School” education or training.
- For Provisional Grade I, enrollment in, or completion of, a DEQ approved training program.
- Post-High School education may reduce experience needed for certification (see [Application Additional Instructions Tables 1 and 2](#)). DEQ will give six months 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/training may reduce experience by 12 months for Grade II and by 36 months for Grade III.
- System operation refresher classes are not required to sit for an exam, but may be very helpful.