



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



PAUL R. LEPAGE
GOVERNOR

PAUL MERCER
COMMISSIONER

May 24, 2017

RE: Wastewater Operator Certification Program

Dear Certified Wastewater Operator:

This letter is being sent to all Maine certified wastewater operators to clarify a few points regarding the Wastewater Operator Certification Program (Program).

First, I want to thank you for the very important work that you do as a certified wastewater operator (operator). The Department of Environmental Protection (Department) understands and appreciates the dedication, knowledge and skill this work requires. We also understand that any operator could at some point in their career become the operator in responsible charge (ORC) of a facility. An ORC has a significant responsibility to manage a multimillion dollar facility built with public funds that protects public health and water quality. With this in mind the Department is striving to ensure the Program is managed in a manner that reflects the importance of this profession.

Program Background:

The Department manages the Program under authority granted in law at MRS 32, Ch. 62., §§4171 – 4182. The law authorizes the Department to certify operators for competency. It also provides requirements for facility classification, continuing education, exams, certification revocation, reciprocity, and rules.

Program authority is further established in rule at C.M.R. 06-096 ch. 531, *Regulations for Wastewater Operators (2006)* (Rule). The Rule provides detailed requirements for classification of facilities, operator grades, qualifications for certification, certification procedures, and renewal procedures.

The Department is responsible for ensuring that the Program is implemented in accordance with the law and Rule and for any interpretation of law and Rule that may be necessary. The Department approves all exam requests and is also responsible for determining if a specific training event qualifies for continuing education (training contact hours – TCH) for the Program. The Department’s Certification Officer is Judy Bruenjes, P.E.

AUGUSTA
17 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0017
(207) 287-7688 FAX: (207) 287-7826

BANGOR
106 HOGAN ROAD, SUITE 6
BANGOR, MAINE 04401
(207) 941-4570 FAX: (207) 941-4584

PORTLAND
312 CANCO ROAD
PORTLAND, MAINE 04103
(207) 822-6300 FAX: (207) 822-6303

PRESQUE ISLE
1235 CENTRAL DRIVE, SKYWAY PARK
PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE 04769
(207) 764-0477 FAX: (207) 760-3143

The Department implements the Program through its contractor the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission - South Portland Office (NEIWPCO).¹ NEIWPCO staff (Leeann Hanson and Spring Connolly) perform all administrative functions for the Program such as processing exam applications and payments, processing certification renewal payments and TCH documentation, maintaining records of TCH, mailing certifications and renewal materials, issuing general Program correspondence, etc. The Department and NEIWPCO work together very closely to ensure the Program operates efficiently and effectively.

Clarifying Issues:

I wanted to clarify the following issues.

Timely Renewal:

Timely renewal of your operator certification is very important. Failure to do so makes the certificate Inactive, increases the cost of renewal, and in some cases may lead to other complications as noted below. Our goal is to have every operator that wishes to maintain certification submit timely renewal. In accordance with the Rule, certificates must be renewed every two years by March 1, as follows:

- Operators whose certificate ends in an even number must renew by March 1 for even-numbered years, and;
- Operators whose certificate ends in an odd number must renew by March 1 for odd-numbered years.

Make sure to note the last digit of your certificate number to determine your biennial renewal deadline. Renewals are handled by NEIWPCO. In order to maintain Active status, an operator must do all of the following by the biennial renewal date of March 1:

- Pay renewal fee (currently \$75);
- Update your contact information, including email, and;
- Provide documentation to show you obtained required TCH.

Certified operators are required to obtain at least eighteen (18) TCH of Department approved training every two years in order to renew their certificate. As an option, up to six (6) TCH can be safety training that relates to wastewater operations. The only exception is Spray Irrigation Treatment System-I (SITS-I) operators who must obtain six (6) technical TCH every two years.

¹ The NEIWPCO also administers the Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC) from this office. These are two separate and distinct programs; however, the two programs are staffed by the same people.

NEIWPCC maintains a list of completed training they have on record for each operator on their website². It is important to be aware of the status of your TCH. If you have taken training that was not preapproved for operator credit you should be aware that credit may or may not be granted based on the content of the training. For more information on obtaining TCH see below or visit the Department or NEIWPCC websites.

Operators can proactively renew their certificate online, using a credit card, beginning five months before their renewal deadline (October 1 of the previous calendar year), or by mailing the renewal form with a check to NEIWPCC, P.O. Box 487, Scarborough, ME 04070-0487.

Inactive Status Renewal (within six months of March 1 deadline):

A certificate that is not renewed completely by the biennial March 1 deadline, including both paying the renewal fee and receiving required TCH, becomes Inactive. In order to renew an Inactive status certificate the operator must:

- Pay renewal fee (currently \$75);
- Update your contact information, including email;
- Provide documentation to show you obtained required TCH, and;
- Pay a reactivation fee (currently \$100).

Any training event that is completed after the March 1 deadline in order to meet the required TCH from the previous two year cycle, will be entirely back dated and applied to the previous two year cycle. In other words, operators cannot “split” TCH from one training event into past and current renewal cycles.

Operator in Responsible Charge (ORC):

Every waste discharge license requires that there be an operator of sufficient grade in responsible charge of a wastewater facility. **In accordance with the Rule, Inactive operators cannot be the ORC at a wastewater facility.** Failure to have an Active certified operator of sufficient grade in responsible charge places the licensed facility in non-compliance. The Department is monitoring this issue and is notifying licensed facilities soon after the March 1 deadlines if their ORC has been placed on Inactive status.

² For ease of administration of multiple NEIWPCC programs, the information for the Wastewater Operator Certification Program is found at the web site <http://jetcc.org/> as noted at the end of this letter. However, as noted above, the Wastewater Operator Certification Program is a program separate and distinct from the JETCC program.

Inactive Status Renewal (after six months of March 1 deadline, but prior to two years past deadline):

If an Inactive certificate is still not renewed 6 months after the March 1 deadline (by September 1 of the renewal year), the operator is subject to the requirements for initial certification, which includes retaking the certification exam to objectively demonstrate their competency.³ In order to renew an Inactive status certificate after six months of the deadline the operator must:

- Pay renewal fee (currently \$75);
- Update your contact information, including email,
- Pay a reactivation fee (currently \$100);
- Pay fees associated with new Computer Based (CBT) or Paper exam:
 - o CBT application fee (currently \$75)
 - o CBT exam administrator fee (currently \$96)or;- o Paper exam in Presque Isle offered two times per year:
 - o Application and exam \$125

Loss of Certification:

A certificate that remains inactive for two years or longer is removed from the master list of certified operators. To be certified in the future an application for initial certification and examination is required.

Awarding Training Contact Hours (TCH):

All TCH for certification renewal must be approved by the Department. If training credit is expected, it is the responsibility of the operator to ensure that TCH are approved by the Department before attending training. Continuing education is only approved in full (one TCH for one contact hour of training) if it directly relates to the day-to-day operations of a wastewater treatment plant and/or collection system. Training may be approved for partial credit by the Department on a case-by-case basis. Please check with the training provider or NEIWPC to ensure training is approved by the Department.

The Department preapproves training programs offered by MeWEA, MRWA, MWUA, NEWEA, NEIWPC, JETCC, CSUS, EPA and others. Training that is not preapproved, such

³ The Rule allows for the Department to grant a waiver for this requirement but waivers are unlikely. Note that reactivation after six months past the deadline uses the exam as the mechanism to demonstrate competency in place of TCH. Therefore documentation of 18 TCH from the prior two year period is not required. However, once the exam is passed and the certificate is again Active, 18 TCH will be required within the current two year cycle in order to renew by the next biennial March 1 deadline. Your certificate biennial renewal date (odd or even year) does not change. If you find yourself in this status you must plan accordingly to ensure you can timely renew at the next applicable March 1 deadline.

as in-house and online training (webinars), will be reviewed by the Department on a case-by-case basis.

Requests for training approval should be sent to the NEIWPC – South Portland Office, who will forward to the Department for review and approval. Requests must include an agenda, instructor bio, and documentation upon completion that the operator attended the entire course. Training providers who disagree with the Department's approval can contact the Department.

Additional Information:

In summary, please make every effort to renew your certificate on time. Additional information on these and other issues can be found on the Department and NEIWPC websites below. In addition, the Department distributes the monthly *O&M News* via email. The *O&M News* contains a listing of approved wastewater training along with a variety of wastewater updates. If you are not receiving the *O&M News* and would like to, you can sign up at the Department link below.

<http://www.maine.gov/dep/water/wwoperator/>

<http://jetcc.org/> ²

Any comments or questions on these issues are best directed to the Department's Certification Officer, Judy Bruenjes at 287-7806, or judy.k.bruenjes@maine.gov.

Once again, thank you for your good work protecting and improving the waters of the great State of Maine!

Sincerely,



BRIAN KAVANAH, Director
Division of Water Quality Management
Bureau of Water Quality

Cc: Judy Bruenjes, Sterling Pierce, Mick Kuhns – DEP
Leeann Hanson, Spring Connolly, Tom Groves – NEIWPC