

Operator Certification Program Annual Report

January 1, 2019– December 31, 2019



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Introduction

This annual report is prepared by the Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Drinking Water Quality (RIDOH). The report covers the period of January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. It is prepared in fulfillment of the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and presented to the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1, Operator Certification Program Office.

This report details the State of Rhode Island's compliance with the nine major program components outlined in the guidelines for the certification and recertification of operators of community and non-transient, non-community public water systems. The State continues to ensure that public health objectives are met by the Operator Certification Office.

Authorization

The State of Rhode Island, Board of Certification of Operators of Public Water Supply Treatment and Public Water Supply Transmission and Distribution Facilities (Board), did not amend the Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Certification of Operators of Public Water Supply Treatment and Public Water Supply Transmission and Distribution Facilities (Rules and Regulations), during the reporting period. The Board continues to meet quarterly to review the applicability and suitability of the Rules and Regulations.

Classification of Systems, Facilities & Operators

There are ninety (90) community and eight-three (83) non-transient, non-community public water systems that are required to comply with the state's operator certification rules and regulations.

The State has five system classification levels for both treatment facilities and distribution facilities: very small system (VSS), Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, and Class 4, with Class 4 being the largest and most complex. Water supply treatment facilities are classified according to a point system incorporating size, water supply source, raw water quality and associated treatment, disinfection, sludge/backwash water disposal, laboratory control, and chemical and physical considerations. Water supply distribution systems are classified according to the population served.

Community Systems by Classification	
D1	4
D2	12
D4	1
T1	3
T2	1
T1/D1	1
T1/D2	6
T1/D3	5
T1/D4	2
T1/VSS	8
T2/D1	1
T2/D3	1
T3/D2	3
T3/D3	1
T3/D4	1
T4/D4	4
VSS	36

NTNC Systems by Classification	
D1	9
D2	2
T1	4
T2	1
T1/D1	5
T1/D2	3
T1/VSS	8
VSS	48
VSS/D1	3

Classification of Systems, Facilities & Operators

There are approximately 720 licenses for treatment and distribution operators issued in the State, with some individuals holding multiple licenses and certifications.

Drinking Water Operators, by License Type, 2019

License Type	License Count
DO Class 1-Full	110
DO Class 1-Grandfathered	18
DO Class 1-Operator in Training	26
DO Class 2-Full	70
DO Class 2-Grandfathered	1
DO Class 2-Operator in Training	6
DO Class 3-Full	99
DO Class 3-Grandfathered	0
DO Class 3-Operator in Training	4
DO Class 4-Full	42
DO Class 4-Grandfathered	1
DO Class VSS-Full	28
DO Class VSS-Grandfathered	18
DO Class VSS-Operator in Training	2
DO Provisional	0
Total	425

License Type	License Count
TO Class 1-Full	77
TO Class 1-Grandfathered	7
TO Class 1-Operator in Training	12
TO Class 2-Full	72
TO Class 2-Grandfathered	4
TO Class 2-Operator in Training	7
TO Class 3-Full	64
TO Class 3-Grandfathered	1
TO Class 3-Operator in Training	9
TO Class 4-Full	25
TO Class 4-Grandfathered	1
TO Class VSS-Full	10
TO Class VSS-Grandfathered	5
TO Class VSS-Operator in Training	1
TO Provisional	0
Total	295

Classification of Systems, Facilities & Operators

Rhode Island requires that owners of all community and NTNC PWS place the direct supervision of their treatment and/or distribution facilities under the responsible charge of a suitably certified drinking water operator. The operator must hold a valid certification equal to or greater than the classification of the PWS.

There were no community or NTNC PWS without a certified operator at the time of data compilation.

If a PWS does not have a certified operator as required by the State due to circumstances beyond their reasonable control, the system may submit a request to the Board of Certification of Operators of Public Water Supply Treatment and Public Water Supply Transmission and Distribution Facilities to seek provisional certification for a candidate. The Board can issue provisional certification after reviewing the candidate's credentials, which only applies to that particular PWS for one year. The State reviewed and approved provisional certification for one operator during this reporting period.

The Center for Drinking Water Quality works diligently to ensure that each PWS has an appropriately certified operator at all times. The system owner updates any changes to the designated certified operator or confirms that no changes have been made each year at PWS license renewal. The Center for Professional Licensing checks to ensure that the operator's license is active and current. The sanitary survey team verifies or updates the designated certified operator at the time of the on-site inspection. The Center for Drinking Water Quality's data management team performs quarterly audits to ensure that each PWS with a certified operator requirement has an appropriate, active certification.

If DWQ learns that a PWS does not have an appropriately and actively certified operator through any of the channels outlined above, the office sends a letter informing the PWS of the requirement and giving a ten-day timeline for updating this information. If the PWS hires a contract operator, they must also provide a fully executed and signed contract. Should the PWS not provide this information within ten days, the matter is referred to compliance and enforcement.

During the reporting period, there was one violation issued for lack of a certified operator in direct responsible charge. There were ten additional PWS identified as not having an appropriately certified operator throughout 2019. All ten issues were resolved within 72 hours of the operator certification program manager making initial contact with the administrative contact.

The State requires that all operating personnel making process control and system integrity decisions about water quality or quantity that affect public health be certified at the proper level. The regulations governing drinking water operator certification state that a certified operator must be available for each operating shift.

Operator Qualifications

The Board continues to maintain membership in the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC). ABC provides exam development, standardizing of exams, and exam validation services to the state.

Treatment, distribution and very small system exams are offered annually in April, July, and November. The state uses the standardized exam format. Exams are held in the auditorium at the Department of Health and proctored by the operator certification program manager.

In December 2019, the operator certification program manager announced at Rhode Island Water Works Association's annual meeting that Rhode Island will begin offering electronic exams via PSI Services.

After each session, the proctor collects candidates' question comment forms for review by the Board. The Board reviews these comments at its quarterly meetings for clarity and accuracy. In 2019, the Board did not recommend that any questions be removed from the question bank.

2019 Exam Statistics

	Year Totals			
	# of Examinees	Passed	Failed	% Passed
VSS	2	2	0	100%
D1	44	23	21	52%
D2	30	11	19	37%
D3	37	5	32	14%
D4	5	1	4	20%
T1	24	11	13	46%
T2	16	5	9	31%
T3	22	7	15	32%
T4	1	0	1	0%
Total	181	65	114	36.00%

Water Treatment Operator Qualifications

Information current as of	12/31/2019
Is certification mandatory?	Yes
Number of Active Treatment Certifications	295

Level Name	1	2	3	4
Education Requirements	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/AS/BS	AS/BS
Experience Requirements	6 mths	2 yrs	4yrs/2 yrs/ 1 yr	4 yrs/2 yrs
Number of exam questions	100	100	100	100
Passing score (%)	70	70	70	70
Continuing Education Requirements (Hrs/3 yrs)	15	15	30	30
Fee to take an exam for the first time	43.50	43.50	43.50	43.50
Fee to retake an exam	43.50	43.50	43.50	43.50

General Information	
Is Direct Responsible Charge required for certification? (Direct Responsible Charge is active daily on-site technical direction and supervision or active daily on-site accountability of a facility or a major segment of a facility.)	No
How are plants/systems rated (By technology/By flow/By population served)?	Technology
Is Operator-In-Training certification offered for those who do not meet experience requirements?	Yes
Are substitutions allowed for any certification requirements?	No
Is an exam required for certification?	Yes
Type of exam (Multiple choice; Essay/short answer; True/False; Performance; Combination)?	Multiple choice and True / False
How is the exam taken (Paper and pencil/On computer/Internet)?	Pencil and paper
Are open book exams allowed?	No
Is there a sequential exam requirement? (That is, operators must start with the lowest level of exam, and pass each exam in sequence; they may not immediately take the highest level of exam for which they are otherwise qualified.)	No, there is no sequential exam requirement
Is certification renewal required?	Yes
Renewal interval (years)	3
Note if varies by category or level:	2-year renewal period for operators in training
Notes	No operator-in-training classification for grade 4 operators. Must qualify for full certification when applying to take exam.

Water Distribution Qualifications

Information current as of	12/31/2019
Is certification mandatory?	Yes
Number of Active Distribution Certifications	425

Level Name	1	2	3	4
Education Requirements	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/AS/BS	AS/BS
Experience Requirements	6 mths	2 yrs	4yrs/2 yrs/ 1 yr	4 yrs/2 yrs
Number of exam questions	100	100	100	100
Passing score (%)	70	70	70	70
Continuing Education Requirements (Hrs/3 yrs)	15	15	30	30
Fee to take an exam for the first time	43.50	43.50	43.50	43.50
Fee to retake an exam	43.50	43.50	43.50	43.50

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Is an exam required for certification?	Yes
Type of exam (Multiple choice; Essay/short answer; True/False; Performance; Combination)?	Multiple choice and True / False
How is the exam taken (Paper and pencil/On computer/Internet)?	Pencil and paper

Are open book exams allowed?	No
Is there a sequential exam requirement? (That is, operators must start with the lowest level of exam, and pass each exam in sequence; they may not immediately take the highest level of exam for which they are otherwise qualified.)	No, there is no sequential exam requirement
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Operator Certification

The state of Rhode Island's operator certification rules and regulations contain a grandfathering provision. Requests for grand-fathered certification were due by February 28, 2003. The Board approved all requests through February 28, 2003.

There were fifty-seven (57) active grandfathered licenses in 2019; a decrease of six from 2018. As those with grandfathered licenses move on from the industry, they will be replaced with certified operators who have met the full requirements, including passing the exam.

Operators with grandfathered licenses are required to complete the same number of training hours per renewal cycle as those who gained their license via exam and reciprocity. No operators with grandfathered licenses were required to obtain additional training in 2019.

Reciprocity

The Board may grant full certifications without examination to any individual holding a certificate that the Board deems comparable to Rhode Island's requirements. The Board reviewed twelve applications for reciprocity from nine candidates, approving eleven requests and denying one.

Enforcement and Discipline

The Board has the responsibility for taking disciplinary action against operators when necessary. The Board may revoke, suspend or otherwise discipline the holder of a certificate issued under the rules and regulations when it is found that the individual performed his/her duties in a negligent manner that produced a supply below standards normal for the particular facility operated; or that he/she has practiced fraud or deception; or that reasonable care, judgment or the application of this knowledge or ability was not used in the performance of his/her duties or that an individual is incompetent or unable to perform his/her duties in violation of Chapter 46-13 of Rhode Island's General Laws, or regulations promulgated pursuant to 46-13.

Disciplinary Actions

There were no disciplinary actions taken in calendar year 2019.

Certification Renewal

Rhode Island operator certification requires that an operator (including those with grandfathered licenses) renew her/his full certification every three years and operator-in-training certification every two years. Renewal requires evidence of completed training credits, a completed application, and assigned affidavit attesting to the validity of information provided during the application process. Training credits are issued as training contact hours (TCH).

As a prerequisite to certificate renewal, an applicant must complete the number of continuing training/education contact hours related to drinking supply treatment and/or transmission and distribution specified below and which are acceptable to the Board. Courses approved for training contact hour credit may be used for renewal a maximum of one time during any renewal period.

Contact Hours Required [(one (1) continuing education unit (CEU) equals ten (10) contact hours)]:

	Two-Year Renewal Period (OIT)	Three-Year Renewal Period (Full)
Class VSS	2 hours	3 hours
Class I	10 hours	15 hours
Class II	10 hours	15 hours
Class III	20 hours	30 hours
Class IV	20 hours	30 hours

Applicants must complete 50% or more of their required training contact hours in technical areas directly related to the operations of the water system employing them and may complete no more than 25% each in the areas of health/safety and supervisory skills.

In 2019, 138 operators renewed their license. The number of operators renewing in each classification is as follows:

D1	23	T1	14
D2	18	T2	21
D3	26	T3	17
D4	9	T4	3
D1-OIT	0	T1-OIT	1
D2-OIT	0	T2-OIT	0
D3-OIT	1	T3-OIT	1
D4-OIT	0	T4-OIT	0
VSS	4		
VSS-OIT	0		

All met the renewal training requirements outlined above.

Training and Program Funding

RIDOH continues its partnership with New England Water Works (NEWWA) to fund training initiatives as included in the work plan and funded through SRF set-asides. RIDOH engaged with NEWWA in summer 2018 to plan for the delivery of full-day and half-day sessions in multiple locations throughout the state, with the first five classes held in fall/winter 2018 and the second five in the series held in winter/spring 2019.

In 2019, NEWWA conducted five training sessions and granted a total of 357 contact hours. Operator attendance increased 54% from 2018 to 2019 (more than double the increase in participation from 2017 to 2018), in part due to the operator certification program's increased promotion and marketing of the free training opportunities.

The program selected topics to address compliance issues, violation trends, and small PWS compliance including:

- Understanding and Complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act,
- How to Avoid Violations by Removing Pathogens in Your System,
- Understanding and Using the Public Notification Rule,
- How to Successfully Operate and Maintain your Groundwater System, and
- Selection, Application & Maintenance of Water System Valves

RIDOH does not directly reimburse operators for expenses related to training and exams. These learning opportunities are free of charge and open to all operators while targeting those from small public water systems.

Training Course Approval

After streamlining the training course and program approval process in 2018, the new process and application were retained throughout 2019.

The list of Board-approved courses found online after a hiatus of several years is now upgraded quarterly following each Board meeting that generates new course approvals, with 402 courses approved in total and 27 new courses and programs added in 2019.

Resources and Personnel

RIDOH's principal community development training specialist oversaw all operator certification program activities in 2019. She reviews and prepares training course approval packages, serves as staff assistant to the Board preparing meetings, recording and documenting the agenda, minutes, and decisions of the Board for public access, and provides applicant eligibility data to the Board. She also manages licensing, renewals, compliance assurance, and licensee correspondence. She also performs exam-related logistics including scheduling, proctoring, and licensee communication. Other duties include contract management, data management, and coordination among other program staff on operator-related issues and initiatives.

In January 2019, the program hired a senior community development training specialist to assist with program coordination and clerical duties.

Staff positions are funded through the DWSRF set-asides. In 2019, the program was staffed at one full-time equivalent (FTE), with both the principal community development training specialist and senior community development training specialist dedicating approximately 50% of their work hours to program activities.

RIDOH's Division of Licensing oversees the License 2000 database which is utilized for the licensing of both drinking water operators and public water systems. DWQ staff are responsible for data entry, generating licenses, and managing renewals within the database. The database is updated daily as data is collected on licensees, systems and compliance status.

Changes such as license renewal and issuance of new licenses made to the License 2000 database are reflected in real time on the state licensee lookup webpage at:

<http://www.health.ri.gov/licensing/#water>.

Recertification

Upon license expiration, the operator is granted a six-month period (during which they are considered unlicensed for the purpose of compliance) to renew without any penalty. After the six-month period, the operator must re-apply and attest to meeting the experience and education requirements as well as taking and passing the exam again. The Board reviews reinstatement requests from operators on a case-by-case basis, and authorized reinstatement to two operators without taking the exam again in 2019.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Board established by section 23-65-2 of the Rhode Island General laws, is comprised of seven (7) persons, including the director of the department of health, or his or her designee and six (6) members appointed by the governor. Of the appointed members, one shall be a registered professional engineer engaged in the practice of water supply engineering, one shall be from a list of qualified operators of a publicly owned water supply treatment facility in the state which has been recommended by the executive committee of the Rhode Island Water Works Association, one shall be from a list of qualified directors of a water supply facility who has general supervisory authority for a water supply facility which has been recommended by the executive committee of the Rhode Island Water Works Association, one shall be a representative of a labor union, one shall be a representative of business or industry, and one shall be a residential consumer of water. The Board holds annual elections to name a chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary.

The current roster of Board members is as follows:

Katherine Mello, P.E. (Chair)	Professional Engineer
Jessica Lynch, P.E. (Vice Chair)	Water Supply Facility Director
Carlene Newman (Secretary)	RIDOH Representative
Robert Bozikowski	Residential Water Consumer
Mario Carlino	Business Industry Representative
Christopher Collins	Publicly Owned Water Supply Operator
John Fletcher	Labor Union Representative.

The Board meets quarterly at locations throughout the state. In addition to regular meetings the Board meets for special sessions as required. General meetings are open meetings and the program manager is responsible for posting meeting agendas on the state website 48 hours prior to meetings.

Each quarter, the operator certification manager compiles the agenda and agenda items, which include exam candidate information for approval, OIT to full certification requests, reciprocity applications, and training course approvals. As needed, the Board addresses and reviews requests for reinstatement.

The Board does not maintain its own website. Exam dates, applications, and training resources are available on-line through the RIDOH website on the Office of Drinking Water Quality web pages at: <http://www.health.ri.gov/wateroperator/>. Data is managed and updated by the program manager.

Program Review

In 2019, the Board initiated a thorough review of its regulations. It held nine meetings at which the operator certification program manager presented research and sample regulations to guide discussion. The Board discussed and captured proposed changes, which will be compiled in 2020 to begin the rulemaking process.



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