



# **OPERATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT FY2015**

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## 1. AUTHORIZATION

The previously submitted Arizona Attorney General’s certification remains in effect as there have been no statutory and/or regulatory changes made to the program. The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) has statutory authority to establish and enforce rules relating to operator certification under Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) § 49-352 and § 49-361.

## 2. CLASSIFICATION OF SYSTEMS, FACILITIES, AND OPERATORS

At the end of fiscal year 2015 (FY15), there were 1,533 active regulated public water systems in Arizona. Pursuant to R18-4-104(A) of the Arizona Administrative Code (A.A.C.), all public water systems (PWSs) in Arizona must retain the services of a certified operator. In FY15, a total of 20 PWSs did not properly notify ADEQ of their certified operator in direct responsible charge (as required by rule), or that the PWSs were currently operating without a certified operator. This information is presented in Table 1. This is a 10% improvement when compared to FY14 PWSs without a certified operator.

In FY15, the Operator Certification Program initiated phone calls to 28 systems for PWSs not listed as having a certified operator of record in ADEQ’s drinking water database (Safe Drinking Water Information System-SDWIS/State). A total of six PWSs without an operator of record were referred to ADEQ’s Compliance Section for enforcement follow-up which may result in the issuance of an enforcement action (e.g., Notice of Violation, Notice of Opportunity to Correct Deficiencies, etc.). The number of PWSs operating without a certified operator of record remained the same at 22 systems from FY14 to FY15 as the Operator Certification Program has continued with follow-up actions, database tracking functions, issuance of notification letters and referred cases to compliance over the course of FY15. In many cases the lack of a certified operator in SDWIS/State was attributable to inadequate communication on the part of the PWS and/or operator, and not necessarily due to the PWS operating without the required certified operator.

**Table 1. FY15 PWSs Without a Certified Operator**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Number</b>
Total number of Community Water Systems (C)	753
Total number of Community Water Systems without a certified operator	<b>6</b>
Total number of Nontransient Noncommunity Water Systems (NTNC)	207
Total number of NTNCs without a certified operator	<b>3</b>
Total number of Transient Noncommunity Water Systems (NC)	572
Total number of NCs without a certified operator	<b>13</b>

### **3. OPERATOR QUALIFICATIONS**

ADEQ coordinates and manages all drinking water and wastewater operator certifications in the State of Arizona in accordance with A.A.C. Title 18, Chapter 5, Article 1. ADEQ contracts with GateWay Community College (GWCC) to proctor exams provided and graded by the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC). GWCC proctors the majority of operator examinations at their Phoenix campus, but also provides exam opportunities at various locations throughout the state. A minimum score of 70 percent correct on an examination is required to pass and become certified. To determine eligibility for admission to a certification exam, ADEQ takes into account an individual's amount and type of qualifying experience and prior education. A.A.C. R18-5-112(D) sets specific qualifying experience and educational requirements for applicants for certification exams for Grades 1 through 4.

New operators that do not meet the minimum experience and/or educational requirements for a specific grade are not permitted to test for that grade; however, operators in place before these regulations were enacted (i.e., grandfathered operators) were allowed to continue in their current positions as long as the facility did not change to require a higher grade operator. At the end of FY15 there are no public water systems solely under the supervision of a grandfathered operator. Currently, there is one active certified operator with grandfathered certificates remaining on file.

### **4. ENFORCEMENT**

ADEQ maintains authority and reserves the right to initiate an enforcement action against a PWS if the facility does not:

- Maintain the services of a certified operator
- The certified operator does not possess a certificate of the grade and type required for the facility, or
- The certified operator does not reside within a 200 mile ground travel radius of the facility.

In FY15, ADEQ issued six enforcement actions, in the form of a Notice of Violation (NOV), against six PWSs for the failure to retain the services of a certified operator.

### **5. CERTIFICATION RENEWAL**

Operator certificates are valid for a three-year period and to maintain eligibility for operator certification renewal, an operator must complete at least 30 professional development hours (PDHs) within that three-year period. A total of 2397 certificates were renewed by the program in FY15.

An operator has 90 days from the date of certificate expiration to submit the required renewal documentation to ADEQ pursuant to A.A.C. R18-5-108. If an operator fails to do so within the required timeframe, the operator must reapply for certification and will be examined as a new applicant.

## **6. OPERATOR CERTIFICATION TRAINING**

For FY15, training was offered through seven two-day workshops and nine one-day workshops held at various locations throughout Arizona. Each workshop provided operators the opportunity to earn professional development hours (PDHs). Attendees can earn a maximum of seven PDHs for a one-day and a maximum of 14 PDHs for a two-day. All of the two-day events were accomplished using capacity development monies. These events were focused on many aspects of water treatment and distribution. The event coordinator used for these events was tasked with managing event registration, reservation confirmations, workshop reminders for registered attendees, providing event directions and in some cases secured the meeting facilities. During FY15 688 attended these workshops in person and approximately 187 people attended these workshops events via webinar.

## **7. RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM**

Detailed certified operator and associated certificate related information is maintained and tracked in ADEQ's Safe Water Operator Certification System (SWOCS) database. In addition, information on certified operators for each regulated PWS is also maintained in ADEQ's Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS/State) database.

The operator certification program currently utilizes two full-time equivalents (FTEs), funded by the federal PWSS grant, to accomplish program objectives.

## **8. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

A.A.C. R18-5-103 establishes a certification committee of eleven members to make recommendations and to provide ADEQ with technical advice and assistance when requested. Members of this committee include an ADEQ employee, Grade 4 certified operators, professional engineers, municipal officials, water system representatives, and college faculty members in sanitary science. While the 11 member Stakeholder Committee did not have a formal meeting in FY 2015 our Program did and continues to have stakeholder engagement. The Program continues to use a Drinking Water/Wastewater Operator Certification list serve to communicate with stakeholders. This list serve membership continues to expand and is now at 2,088 subscribers. In FY 2015, 83 list serve messages and notifications were sent out that covered topics such as monthly renewal reminders, certification fee updates, upcoming ADEQ and non-ADEQ workshops and monitoring tips for public water systems.

The Program coordinates and communicates with the recipients of the EPA Small Systems Grants including Environmental Finance Center (EFC), Rural Water Association of Arizona (RWAA), and Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) by providing system information for systems requiring technical assistance, communicating training events via list serve and recommending training locations. The program coordinated with Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) to host one EPA Small Drinking Water System workshop (September 16-18, 2014). ADEQ's Program representatives also staffed booths at

both RWAA Leadership Conferences (August 26 – 28, 2014 & March 3-5, 2015) as well as the AZ Water Association Conference (May 5 - 7, 2015).

The program used web-based online survey system (Survey Monkey) at all workshops allowing stakeholders to relay training/programs topics they would like to see. Practice Exams are provided to operators and non-operators that are in the process of becoming certified. Large practice exam sessions were held at the seven two-day workshops in FY 2015 and four additional sessions were coordinated with RWAA. Program staff provides practice exams to small groups or individuals as requested. Approximately 30 individuals attended individual or small group exam sessions in FY 2015.

## **9. PROGRAM REVIEW**

The ADEQ Drinking Water Section (DWS) conducts an annual internal review of the operator certification program. This review includes tracking requests for reciprocity, early examination requests, and certificate renewal audits. In FY15, ADEQ processed 297 and approved 290 requests for reciprocity. The DWS also processed 131 requests for early examinations with 118 approvals and thirteen denials. In FY15 approximately ten to fifteen percent of all renewal requests were audited for PDH verification purposes. There were no implemented changes to the operator certification rules or program operations for FY15.

## **10. IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE UPDATE**

All permanent regulations have been implemented; however, modifications to program operations have been made on an as needed basis.

Historically, ADEQ utilized third-party examination contractors to develop and proctor all operator exams. In FY08, ADEQ returned to managing all examination services “in house” while staff undertook a review of all available examination options (e.g., nationalized testing services, continuation of third-party contractors).

In early FY09, ADEQ entered into a contract with the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) and GateWay Community College (GWCC). ABC currently provides all operator certification exams and grading services while GWCC oversees all exam proctoring services. An examination fee of \$77 per exam was adopted at the beginning of this contract. The fee was increased to the current rate of \$87 per exam in FY11 due to increases in testing service administrative costs.

In early FY14, ADEQ renewed a contract with the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) and GateWay Community College (GWCC). ABC provides all operator certification exams and grading services while GWCC oversees all exam proctoring services. With the new contract the fee remained the same at \$87 per exam.

In FY15, a total of 2339 operator examinations were proctored in approximately 120 testing sessions held by GWCC across the State of Arizona. A total of 1339 operator examinations were for drinking water distribution and treatment. A breakdown of the examinations conducted by classification and grade are shown on Table 2.

**Table 2. Summary of Examination Results from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Water Distribution Pass	232	125	51	32	440
Water Distribution Fail	213	72	51	39	373
Water Distribution Total	445	197	102	71	815
<b>Water Distribution % Pass</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>53%</b>
Water Treatment Pass	156	89	34	24	303
Water Treatment Fail	114	29	50	31	223
Water Treatment Total	227	118	84	55	526
<b>Water Treatment % Pass</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Wastewater Collection Pass	137	85	43	33	297
Wastewater Collection Fail	62	21	19	22	124
Wastewater Collection Total	199	106	62	55	422
<b>Wastewater Collection % Pass</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>70%</b>
Wastewater Treatment Pass	138	56	40	24	258
Wastewater Treatment Fail	157	49	53	58	317
Wastewater Treatment Total	295	105	93	82	575
<b>Wastewater Treatment % Pass</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>TOTAL EXAMS</b>					<b>2339</b>
<b>OVERALL % PASS</b>					<b>56%</b>