



Focus on Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Certification Fees

from Ecology's Water Quality Program, Wastewater Operator Certification Program

Wastewater Operator Certification Program history

Wastewater operators provide a critical line of defense in protecting Washington's water quality. The Department of Ecology's (Ecology) Wastewater Operator Certification Program (OpCert) ensures operators meet minimum education, experience, and professional growth requirements by providing information about technical advances in operating practices.

Funding impacts service

In 1986, the Legislature mandated that the OpCert Program fund itself through fees. The fees set in statute in 1986 no longer support the program. In fact, a fee of \$50 in 1986 is worth only \$28 today. Program fees fund a part-time 0.6 position. Ecology supplements the program with an additional full-time employee.

The number of operators has grown from approximately 1,200 in 1986 to nearly 2,000 in 2006. Ecology expects this growth trend to continue. The Association of Boards of Certification (ABC), a professional association with 70 certifying authorities nationwide, recommends at least one staff person per 1,000 active certificates. Washington's program provides only the minimum basic services to operators and local governments.

Ecology's proposal

Ecology wants to enhance service to operators. Enhancements would improve customer service, shorten response time to operators' questions, update and improve the certification database, and upgrade and improve the Operator Certification Web site. To achieve and maintain this level of service, Ecology estimates that the program needs 2.5 full-time positions.

Ecology is proposing a change to the Legislature of the 20-year-old fee cap set for the Operator Certification Program authorized in Chapter 70.95B RCW.

The proposal would request a change in statute to allow Ecology to set fees through regulations (rule making). This would provide the flexibility necessary to maintain adequate staff and serve the growing number of operators. Ecology would also propose that the fees go to the permit fee account to streamline processing.

During rule making, Ecology would seek public input on the content of the rule. Ecology plans to schedule in-depth discussions with operators to determine the appropriate fee levels. Fees would not increase until Ecology completes the rule-making process.

How would this affect you?

A fee increase would affect everybody who holds a wastewater treatment plant operator certification because Ecology anticipates an increase in renewal, application, and other



program fees. Employers that pay for their operators' renewals, application fees, and exam fees would also be affected by the change.

When would this happen?

If the legislation is adopted, changes would become effective July 1, 2008. However, amending the law would allow the rule-making process to begin. Rule making includes a process to include interested parties. The process can take more than a year to complete. Any fee increase would not become effective until state fiscal year 2010 (July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010).

How can I get involved?

Ecology welcomes your comments regarding this proposal. To provide comments please join our OpCert e-mail list at: http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/op_cert/index.html

Or, you may contact:

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E-mail Poppy at poca461@ecy.wa.gov or Melinda at mewi461@ecy.wa.gov

For legislative information contact:

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You may also fax your comments to 360-407-6426, wastewater operator certification.

For additional information on this topic, see Ecology's Web site at:

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/op_cert/index.html

If you need this publication in an alternate format, please call the Water Quality Program at 360-407-6401. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.