



NEVADA BOARD OF CERTIFICATION FOR WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OPERATORS

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Operator Certification Regulation Changes – What You Need to Know

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) has revised the Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) governing the certification of wastewater treatment plant operators. The regulation change was adopted by the Legislative Council Bureau on May 16, 2018. This regulation applies solely to Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator certifications. Rule changes to the non-regulatory certifications (Wastewater Quality Analyst, Industrial Waste Inspector, Collections System Operator, Plant Maintenance Technician, and Industrial Waste Operator) will be phased in at a later date.

The regulation change raises the bar for Nevada operators, who have been disadvantaged in the national job market for many years. The revisions were drafted by NDEP in cooperation with the Certification Board. The purpose was to ensure ongoing protection of public health and the environment in an increasingly demanding regulatory environment, and to align with national credentialing standards for operators.

Existing certifications in good standing are exempted from meeting the revised NAC requirements for initial experience and initial education for as long as the existing certification is maintained in good standing. If an existing certification becomes decertified under NAC, all revised NAC requirements will apply to re-acquiring that grade of certification.

Operators seeking new certifications or advancing existing certifications to a higher grade (including applicants who failed previous exams) will need to meet all revised NAC requirements. These requirements include the initial education, total experience, grade level experience, and plant classification experience for the certification grade being sought.

CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Certified Operators (certificants) are now required to complete pre-approved continuing education for renewing certifications. The following number of contact hours are required for each 2-year renewal (and must be obtained within each 2-year renewal cycle). Ten contact hours are equivalent to one continuing education unit (CEU).

- Grade I – 5 contact hours (0.5 CEU)
- Grade II – 10 contact hours (1.0 CEU)
- Grade III – 15 contact hours (1.5 CEU)
- Grade IV/V – 20 contact hours (2.0 CEU)

Continuing education requirements apply to both existing and new certifications. For existing certifications expiring May 16, 2018 or later, certificants will not need to obtain continuing education for their first renewal, but will need to meet continuing education requirements for all future renewals. As an example, an operator whose certification expires in October 2018 will not need to obtain continuing education for that renewal, but will need to meet continuing education requirements for their October 2020 and all subsequent renewals (and the continuing education for the October 2020 renewal must be obtained between October 2018 and October 2020). Pre-approved courses can be found on the NWEA website (www.nvwea.org). The Certification Board will consider courses that have not been pre-approved, though the certificant runs the risk of them not being accepted.

If an existing certificant obtains a higher grade of certification after May 16, 2018, the delayed continuing education provisions described in the previous paragraph are not applicable, and the certificant must adhere to all revised continuing education requirements pertaining to the new certification.

INITIAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Operators seeking new or upgraded certifications are now required to meet minimum initial education requirements for each grade level, all of which must be wastewater related (as determined by the Certification Board). The education requirements are cumulative and include the previous grade's education (e.g. Grade IV certification requires the Grade III education requirements plus two additional post-secondary courses). A post-secondary course is a college level course comprised of at least 36 hours of instruction (classroom, correspondence, or online) that the Certification Board deems relevant (i.e. wastewater treatment, chemistry, biology, math, etc).

- Grade I – 60 hours
- Grade II – 120 hours
- Grade III – 120 hours and two postsecondary courses
- Grade IV – 120 hours and four postsecondary courses

EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

Operators seeking certification are required to meet specific minimum experience requirements for each grade level. The experience must be relevant, as determined by the Certification Board. Operators can no longer obtain certification at grade levels higher than the classification of the plant where they are employed.

- Grade I – 1 year operating experience at a Class I(or higher) facility
- Grade II – Grade I certification and 2 years of operating experience, with at least 1 year at a Class II (or higher) facility
- Grade III – Grade II certification and 3 years of operating experience, with at least 1 year at a Class III (or higher) facility
- Grade IV – Grade III certification and 4 years of operating experience, with at least 1 year at a Class IV (or higher) facility

RESTRICTED CERTIFICATES

The previous regulations limited the Operator-in-Training (OIT) Certificate to Grade I. The revised regulations provide for Restricted Certificates at each grade level, and existing OIT certificates are being transitioned to Restricted Certificates. Similar to the OIT, Restricted Certificates carry no regulatory authority to operate but serve as a stepping stone to the next level of certification for operators seeking advancement at their current facility or employment at a facility with a higher classification level than their current facility. Restricted Certificates are valid for five years and cannot be renewed. To obtain a Restricted Certificate, operators must meet the following education and experience requirements, AND receive a passing score on the appropriate certification exam:

- Grade I – High school diploma or GED
- Grade II – Hold an active unrestricted Grade I certification for a minimum of 1 year and meet Grade II education requirements
- Grade III – Hold an active unrestricted Grade II certification for a minimum of 1 year and meet Grade III education requirements
- Grade IV – Hold an active unrestricted Grade III certification for a minimum of 1 year and meet Grade IV education requirements

SUSPENDED AND EXPIRED CERTIFICATIONS

A certification will be deemed suspended if it is not renewed by the expiration date. Certificants must submit their application, supporting documentation (continuing education), and fee prior to the expiration date. A Certification will be deemed decertified if it is not renewed within six months following the expiration date. Once decertified, the certification may no longer be renewed.

PLANT CLASSIFICATIONS

The NAC plant classification table was revised as part of the regulation change. The updated table more accurately reflects relevant treatment technology for each operator certification grade, and is less reflective of flow. The majority of facilities in the state will maintain their existing plant classification.

Treatment Process	Plant Classification
Stabilization Ponds or Lagoons	I
Primary Treatment (settling, grit removal, etc.)	
Fixed Film Treatment (e.g. trickling filters, etc.) for BOD removal	II
Activated Sludge (without nitrogen removal and <20,000 gpd)	
Solids Treatment (thickening / dewatering)	
Fixed Film Treatment (e.g. trickling filters, etc.) for Nutrient removal	III
Activated Sludge (with nitrogen removal or >20,000 gpd)	
Tertiary Treatment	IV
Activated Sludge (>10 mgd)	
Indirect Potable Reuse	

FEE STRUCTURE

The fees charged by NDEP have not increased since the regulatory program was implemented in 1992. Not surprisingly, an assessment of the program determined that NDEP was subsidizing approximately 60% of the cost of the program. A fee increase was necessary to make the certification program more sustainable moving forward. The new fees still do not fully cover program costs and NDEP will continue subsidizing the program.

- Initial Certification: \$140 (previously \$60)
- Renewals: \$110 (previously \$30)
- Restricted Certificate: \$90 (previously \$60 with no conversion fee to unrestricted Grade I/II/III/IV certification)
- Conversion of Restricted Certificate to unrestricted Grade I/II/III/IV certification: \$70 (previously \$0)
- Reciprocity: \$150 (previously \$75)
- Reinstatement (within 6 months of suspended certification): \$80 (previously \$0)

The Certification Board is at your disposal to answer questions. For questions or further information, please contact the Program Administrator, Ashley Jacobson, by email at Certification@nvwea.org or by phone at (775) 465-2045.