

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
Water Bureau
Noncommunity Program

***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR CERTIFIED
OPERATORS OF NONCOMMUNITY WATER SYSTEMS***

Who is required to have a certified operator?

All public water systems classified as nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) or community water supplies and certain transient noncommunity (TNC) public water supplies (PWSs) that have defined treatment must have a certified operator.



What is “defined treatment” for transient water supplies?

Any chemical treatment of the supply for either (1) public health reasons or (2) where chemicals are being injected that, if misused, could put the public at risk. Examples of this would be chlorination, phosphate chlorination, etc.

How soon must the PWS have a certified operator?

An existing PWS must have a certified operator by December 8, 2002. Any new NTNC or TNC (with defined treatment) PWS must have a certified operator prior to beginning operations.

What is meant by the term “operator”?

The operator may be the owner of a PWS or the person designated by the owner as the responsible individual in overall charge of the water system. This person makes decisions regarding the daily operation of the PWS that could directly impact the quality and quantity of the drinking water being supplied.

What are the operator’s responsibilities?

The operator is the one who arranges for repairs or disinfection in the case of a problem with the PWS, or for bottled water if an alternate temporary supply is necessary. The operator would insure that the sampling is being done on schedule and reported to the regulatory agency as required. The operator would make sure that the PWS records are available and up to date and that all public notices would be properly posted. The operator would implement the contingency plan should a problem arise and would be the main contact for the regulatory agency in any matter regarding the PWS.

What is the difference between a restricted and unrestricted certificate?

A restricted certificate is allowed for current operators employed by the owner, if they attend a specific DEQ training session, and provided the PWS has had a satisfactory compliance history. The restricted certificate is issued on a one-time basis. An individual with a restricted certificate can only operate the system(s) they are certified for after having completed the approved training.

If an individual chooses to take a specified examination and passes it, they receive an *unrestricted* certificate. It is not a requirement that a person wishing to take the examination attend training prior to the test. An unrestricted certificate means a person can operate any PWS in the class for which they are certified.

If a facility operates 24 hours a day, is the operator required to be on-site at all times?

No, it is not required that the operator be on-site at all times; however, the PWS is required to have in place a plan for proper operation of the system when the operator in charge is not available. PWSs with treatment will require more oversight than ones with no treatment.

Does the certified operator have to be employed full time by the PWS owner, or can a certified third party be hired?

A third-party contractor may be used, provided they are certified at the level required by the classification of the PWS or they are certified at a higher level.

Can the certificate held by the previous operator be transferred to his or her replacement?

No, a restricted certificate is issued on a one-time basis only to a person employed by the PWS as the water supply operator. This person may also be a third party currently contracted by the PWS as the operator. However, when the operator leaves, the new operator must have an unrestricted certificate.

Can the PWS have more than one certified operator?

Yes. However, only one restricted certificate is allowed for a single water system. Any other operators for the system would have to have an unrestricted certificate.

Can a person be certified for more than one PWS?

Yes, if they were either designated as the restricted operator prior to December 8, 2002, or carry an unrestricted certificate at or above the required classification level for the PWSs they service.



What is required for a certified operator to renew his or her certification?

Certification must be renewed every three years through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Operator Training and Certification Unit (OTCU). Most TNC (with treatment) or NTNC PWSs will require a level "5" certified operator. A minimum of nine hours of continuing education in the three-year certification cycle is required to renew a level "5" certificate. Higher classifications (4, 3, 2, and 1) require more hours of continuing education. If a restricted certificate expires, the person must reinstate the certificate within one year, otherwise, they will have to pass the examination to become certified again.

How can the operator earn continuing education units?

Training opportunities currently exist through the Michigan Section American Water Works Association, the Michigan Rural Water Association, Local Health Departments and the MDEQ. Additional training will be made available to operators and others. However, all classes must have prior approval through the Operator Training and Certification Unit to determine if they meet the continuing education requirements.

For more information:

MDEQ, Water Bureau, Noncommunity Unit: 517-241-1370

MDEQ, OTCU: 517-241-7199

Web site: www.michigan.gov/deq