

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Public Act 87 of 2021

Article 2, Section 406

Study on Certifying Prisoners to Become Drinking Water, Wastewater, Stormwater Operators

OFFENDER SUCCESS ADMINISTRATION

Sec 406. From the funds appropriated in part 1, the department shall conduct a study in consultation with the department of environment, Great Lakes, and energy, to determine the feasibility of including prisoners nearing their earliest release dates in the wastewater operator certification program administered by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. The department shall submit a report by January 15 to the senate and house subcommittees on corrections and the senate and house fiscal agencies on the feasibility of training and certifying prisoners to become water, drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater operators. If it is determined that training and certification of prisoners is not feasible, the department shall report on the reasons for infeasibility.

Wastewater, Industrial Wastewater/Commercial Wastewater Operator Certification:

After consultation with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), it was determined that it is not feasible for prisoners within the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) to be certified in these areas at the current time. Multiple levels of certification are available for Wastewater Operators in Michigan with varying levels of educational requirements and practical experience. Regardless of the level of certification and education, experience at a treatment facility or in the field is a requirement for all certifications. The minimum certification available as a Wastewater Operator requires one year (2000 hours) of acceptable operational experience in a treatment facility. No MDOC facilities currently have licensed treatment facilities on site to provide the required experience to allow for certification in this area. It is also not feasible for the Department to allow prisoners access to licensed treatment facilities in the community for training, as this would significantly strain MDOC custody staff resources and could pose a risk to public safety.

Discussion between the agencies did include the possibility of creating a new entry level certification that would allow for training during incarceration and a limited certification while the individual completes their required hours of experience post-release in a licensed treatment facility, prior to full certification. This would require regulatory changes, as well as appropriate legislative support including funding, to be pursued further.

Water, Drinking Water Treatment Certification:

After consultation with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) it was determined that it would be feasible to provide limited training and certification in this area, but it is not recommended at this time. There are three examination categories in this area: "F" for Filtration, "D" for Limited Treatment and "S" for Distribution. Each category has levels 1 through 5 within them. Levels 1 and 2 require education beyond a High School Diploma, while the remaining levels require only a high school diploma. Levels 1 through 4 require relevant experience and that experience cannot be gained within MDOC facilities, as they lack drinking water treatment systems, as most use municipal water sources. Prisoners could only complete the requirements for Level 5 certification while incarcerated, as Level 5 requires no experience and deals solely with noncommunity water supplies (groundwater or surface water). There would be limited value to this certification from an offender employment perspective and it would not address the employment needs of local municipal water systems, which is why a training curriculum is not being recommended.

Storm Water Operator Certification:

After consultation with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) it was determined that providing training and certification in this area could be accomplished within the prison training programs, as full certification could be earned while incarcerated. This certification would cover Storm Water Operators for construction sites and for industrial facilities. Training manuals are available through EGLE and could easily be distributed to students in designated programs with instructor support to study and eventually take the certification test. The cost of this certification test would be paid for by the MDOC. Storm Water Operator Certification would serve as a stackable credential that students could receive in one of the following vocational training programs offered by the MDOC: Carpentry, Plumbing/Electrical, or Concrete/Masonry.

MDOC is currently working with DTMB on an education network upgrade within the prisons that could allow for controlled access to certification materials and eventually the actual online testing to receive certification. The Department will continue to work on this project and begin making Storm Water Operator Certification materials available to eligible prisoners prior to the end of the fiscal year.