

Operator Certification Bulletin



ISSN 2818-0895

In this issue

➤➤ Announcement

- Going digital

➤➤ Did you know...?

- Drinking water and wastewater system classification
- Concurrent experience

➤➤ Test your knowledge

Going digital: streamlining certification for Ontario's water and wastewater operators

The Ontario Water Wastewater Certification Office (OWWCO) continues to expand its use of digital tools, making it easier and faster for Ontario's certified water and licensed wastewater operators to stay on top of their certification and licensing requirements.



TIP: To ensure you don't miss important communication from OWWCO, be sure to check your inbox and occasionally your spam folder. To avoid messages being filtered out, add our email address to your contacts or mark us a trusted sender.

An important change in the past year was the shift to email-based renewal reminders. No more waiting for letters in the mail or worrying about lost paperwork. Operators now receive their certification and licensing renewal notices three months before expiry, exam registration confirmation and exam results directly in their inbox. This change ensures information is delivered quickly, reliably, and in a format that's easier to keep track of. OWWCO updates your contact information which includes your email address with the information provided in your application form. If you are unsure whether your email information is up-to-date, now is a great time to double-check this with OWWCO – future communications will primarily be sent this way.

Going digital

Behind the scenes...

OW/WCO has also digitized all paper records, transitioning to a secure electronic document management system. This means faster access to records, improved security, and a more streamlined process overall.

Electronic forms are another big step forward. In 2024, the Change of Address form and the Operator System User Access Request form went digital, making it easier than ever for operators to update their information and access the certification system. There's more to come - the ministry has been working on digitalizing the exam application form and the Operator-in-Training (OIT) Issuance form. This will simplify the process of applying for exams and OIT certificates, while reducing paperwork and allowing for secure online payments.

One thing is certain: the operator certification program is well into the digital age, with OW/WCO continuing to expand and enhance its digital services. Going forward, email will become the primary way operators receive important communications, and its use will continue to grow more through 2025 and beyond.



Visit www.owwco.ca
for the latest updates

Drinking water and wastewater system classification

To protect public health and ensure effective system operator oversight, Ontario classifies drinking water and wastewater systems based on their size, complexity, and function. Classification requirements under Ontario Regulation 128/04 (drinking water) and Ontario Regulation 129/04 (wastewater), including system types, classification levels, and applicable exceptions.

Applicability

Drinking Water

Under O. Reg. 128/04, classification applies to the following types of municipal residential drinking water systems as defined in O. Reg. 170/03:

- large municipal residential systems, and
- small municipal residential systems that use surface water or GUDI sources as water sources.



System classification cont...

Applicability

Wastewater

Under O. Reg. 129/04, classification applies to:

1. Municipal or Crown-owned sewage works requiring an Environmental Compliance Approval (ECA) under section 53 of the Ontario Water Resources Act (OWRA), where sewage is treated.
2. Privately owned sewage works requiring an ECA under section 53 of the OWRA, where sewage includes:
 - domestic wastewater for example, from toilets, sinks, kitchens
 - sewage typical of residential subdivisions, excluding stormwater or drainage



The following type of wastewater systems do not require classification:

- on-site sewage systems, for example, septic systems or subsurface disposal sewage systems, unless specified in the ECA.
- industrial sewage systems unless they also treat domestic sewage or combine both types in a shared treatment process.
- private property wastewater collection systems are considered plumbing systems and are not subject to classification or licensing



System Classification cont...

System types and classification levels

- Drinking water: Municipal residential systems are divided into three subsystem types, including water treatment, water distribution, and water distribution and supply subsystems, each with four classification levels (Class I to IV).
- Wastewater: Facilities are divided into two types, wastewater treatment and wastewater collection, each with four classification levels (Class I to IV).

Reclassification

System reclassification is required when:

- the system is modified or expanded such that it no longer meets the criteria under which it was last classified
- the Director determines the system no longer meets its original classification or regulatory updates apply

If an amendment to the Drinking Water Works Permit or ECA is submitted to Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, it is recommended to check with OW/WCO to determine if reclassification is required.

System owners must apply to the Director for classification. The certificate of classification must be prominently displayed at the subsystem or its managing premises.

Non-Provincial Systems

Federal and First Nations drinking water and wastewater systems are not subject to mandatory classification but may request assessment to support operator certification and experience recognition. These systems receive a letter and certificate with equivalent classification.

Concurrent operating experience



Operators working in multiple types of drinking water subsystems and wastewater facilities may be credited with full-time operating experience in more than one system type at the same time. This policy is known as concurrent operating experience. This policy applies if the operator is responsible for operating and works to full capacity in each system type (e.g., Water Treatment and Water Distribution) during the same period.

Definition of full capacity

To qualify for concurrent experience, an operator must be working to full capacity in each system type during the same period.

This means:

- working the full number of hours reasonably expected based on operational requirements.
- performing duties in multiple system types.

This definition applies to:

- Small systems: with minimal operational requirements, less than 36.25 hours/week.
- Larger systems: Where staffing models divide responsibilities similarly among multiple operators.

Concurrent operating experience cont...

When concurrent experience is *not* credited

Concurrent experience will not be credited in the following situations:

1. Working less than full capacity

- Operators working fewer hours than other full-time operators are not considered to be working to full capacity. Only the actual time spent in each system is credited.

2. Rotating between system types

- Operators assigned to different systems on a long-term rotational basis (e.g., every three months) are not eligible. However, short-term rotations (daily or weekly) are typically only accepted for operators working in small systems that employ few operators.

3. Back-up or on-call roles

- Operators working primarily in a back-up or on-call capacity in a system type are not eligible for concurrent experience credit.



Concurrent operating experience cont...

When concurrent experience *is* credited

Concurrent experience may be credited to operators working in different system combinations. Common examples include:

- Water treatment and water distribution: when water treatment operators are responsible for portions of the distribution system (e.g., storage, re-chlorination)
- Wastewater treatment and wastewater collection: where wastewater treatment operators are responsible for parts of the collection system (e.g., lift stations, force mains, or odour control)
- Water distribution and wastewater collection: when operators perform daily duties in both systems as required

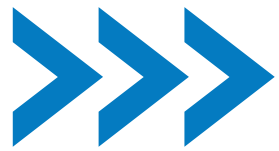
Operators working in all four system types – water treatment, water distribution, wastewater treatment, and wastewater collection – may also be credited, provided they:

- perform full-time operating duties in each system throughout the whole year.
- work to full capacity in each subsystem and facility.

Assessment process

The ministry evaluates concurrent experience on a case-by-case basis during the certification and licensing application process.

If clarification is required, the Ontario Water Wastewater Certification Office will contact both the operator and the employer's authorized representative that verified the experience.



Test your knowledge

1. What should operators do to ensure they receive important emails from OWWCO?
 - a) Check their mailbox regularly
 - b) Add OWWCO's email to their contacts and check spam folders
 - c) Call OWWCO monthly
 - d) Subscribe to a newsletter

2. Which of the following wastewater systems are not required to be classified under Ontario regulations?
 - a) Municipal wastewater treatment plants
 - b) Industrial sewage systems that treat domestic sewage
 - c) On-site sewage systems unless specified in the ECA
 - d) Wastewater collection systems on private property

3. What does "working to full capacity" mean in the context of concurrent experience?
 - a) Working overtime
 - b) Performing duties in multiple system types to the fullest expected extent
 - c) Supervising other operators
 - d) Attending training sessions

4. What triggers a system reclassification?
 - a) Operator retirement
 - b) System expansion or modification
 - c) Seasonal changes
 - d) Routine maintenance

5. Which of the following scenarios does not qualify for concurrent experience?
 - a) Daily rotation between water and wastewater systems
 - b) Full-time duties in both water treatment and distribution
 - c) Long-term rotation every three months
 - d) Operating both wastewater treatment and collection systems

The Operator Certification Bulletin is a publication of the
Certification and Licensing Programs Office, Environmental Policy
Division, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

<http://www.ontario.ca/Environment>

ISSN 2818-0895

© King's Printer for Ontario, 2025

