



Rulemaking Informational Item

Wastewater Operator Certification Program

September 27, 2024
Portland

Agenda

- Program Overview
- Need for Rulemaking
- Proposed Rules
- Status/Timeline
- Questions



Purpose of Program

- To protect public health and the environment
- Permit requirement
 - Each sewage collection or treatment system must have at least one designated supervisory operator that is certified at or above the classification of the system
 - Small Wastewater System (SWWS) if less than 500 people or 150 connections
 - Collection and Treatment Class I-IV, based on complexity

Program Authority/History

- DEQ program evolved from a voluntary program
- No corresponding Federal Regulation
- ORS 448.405 through 448.430 and 448.992 give DEQ authority to create rules and implement a certification program
- OAR Chapter 340, Division 049 established in 1988
 - Only minor rule edits and fee increases since then

Program Description

- Statewide, Fee-funded program
 - Application Fees: certification and renewal/reinstatement
 - Annual Program Support Fee paid by the sewage system
- 2.0 FTE – Coordinator and Assistant
- Approximately 1,400 Operators
- Almost 400 Systems
- In March 2023: transitioned from paper-based applications to Your DEQ Online (YDO)

Need for Rulemaking

- Operators provide vital daily services
- Shortage of operators due to aging workforce
- EPA and Congress recognize challenge of recruiting and retaining operators
- Technological advancements means we need technologically-savvy operators

Certification Process

- Applicant applies through Your DEQ Online (YDO)
- Must meet education and experience requirements
- Approved to take nationally standardized exam
- Once they pass, they are issued their certification
 - Valid for two years
- Renewal requires 20 hours of continuing education

Proposed Rules: Definitions

- Currently undefined
 - **“Part-time”** – in regards to the Designated Supervisory Operator requirement means less than 30hrs/wk if employed by system owner or city
 - **“Full-time”** – in regards to the Designated Supervisory Operator requirement means at least 30hrs/wk if employed by system owner or city
 - If under contract supervision, hours will be determined by the signers (Designated Supervisory Operator and owner/authorized representative)

Proposed Rules: Reciprocity

- Currently we can only accept exam results from an applicant that is certified by another state or province
- “Professional Operators” certified by Water Professionals International take the **same standardized exam** required by DEQ
- Proposing to add “Department-approved certifying entity”
- Applicant still needs to meet education and experience requirements



Proposed Rules: Pathways to Certification

TABLE 1: COLLECTION SYSTEM OPERATION															
Certificate Level and Qualifications	Path A			Path B			Path C			Path D			Path E		
	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class
SWWS	HS	1	any										4	6mos.	
Grade I	HS	1	any	WET	6mos.								4	6mos.	
Provisional I	HS	any	any												
Grade II	HS	3	any	1	2	any							4	1	
Grade III	HS	8 6	3 4 ≥ II	1	5	2.5 ≥ II	2	4	2 ≥ II	3	3	1.5 ≥ II	4	2	1 ≥ II
Grade IV	HS	10 8	4 5 ≥ III	1	8 7	4 ≥ III	2	6	3 ≥ III	3	5	2.5 ≥ III	4	4	2 ≥ III

* Years of experience

3.5

TABLE 2: TREATMENT SYSTEM OPERATION															
Certificate Level and Qualifications	Path A			Path B			Path C			Path D			Path E		
	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class	Ed	Exp*	System Class
SWWS	HS	1	any										4	6mos.	
Grade I	HS	1	any	WET	6mos.								4	6mos.	
Provisional I	HS	any	any												
Grade II	HS	3	any	1	2	any							4	1	
Grade III	HS	8 6	3 4 ≥ II	1	5	2.5 ≥ II	2	4	2 ≥ II	3	3	1.5 ≥ II	4	2	1 ≥ II
Grade IV	HS+1	10 8	4 5 ≥ III	2	6	3 ≥ III	3	5	2.5 ≥ III	4	4	2 ≥ III	MS/PHD	3	1.5 ≥ III

Degrees must be in:

- Engineering
- Chemistry
- Water/wastewater technology
- Physical/biological science
- Other subjects determined relevant to wastewater system operation, e.g.
 - Data Analysis
 - Computer Science

Proposed Rules: SWWS Operator-in-Training

- Waiver for experience
 - Currently only available for Collection/Treatment Grade I
- Must:
 - Have high school diploma/GED
 - Enroll in DEQ-approved training
- After passing the exam, applicants have three years to gain the required experience

Proposed Rules: System Classification

Table A Criteria for Classifying Wastewater Treatment Systems				
Treatment Type	Classification			
	Design Average Dry Weather Flow (MGD)			
	≤ 1	> 1 ≤ 5	> 5 ≤ 10	> 10
Lagoon (Non-aerated)	I	I	I	I
Lagoon (Aerated)	I	II	II	II
Biofiltration	II	II	III	III
Extended Aeration	II	II	III	III
Conventional Activated Sludge	II	II	III	IV
Membrane Bioreactor	II	II	III	IV
Activated Sludge with Separate Fixed Film	III	III	IV	IV
Sequencing Batch Reactor, Moving Bed Biofilm Reactor, Integrated Fixed Film Activated Sludge, Oxidation Ditch, Other Suspended Growth Media	III	III	IV	IV
Activated Sludge with Tertiary Filtration (includes chemical phosphorus removal)	III	III	IV	IV
Activated Sludge with Biological Nutrient Removal	III	IV	IV	IV

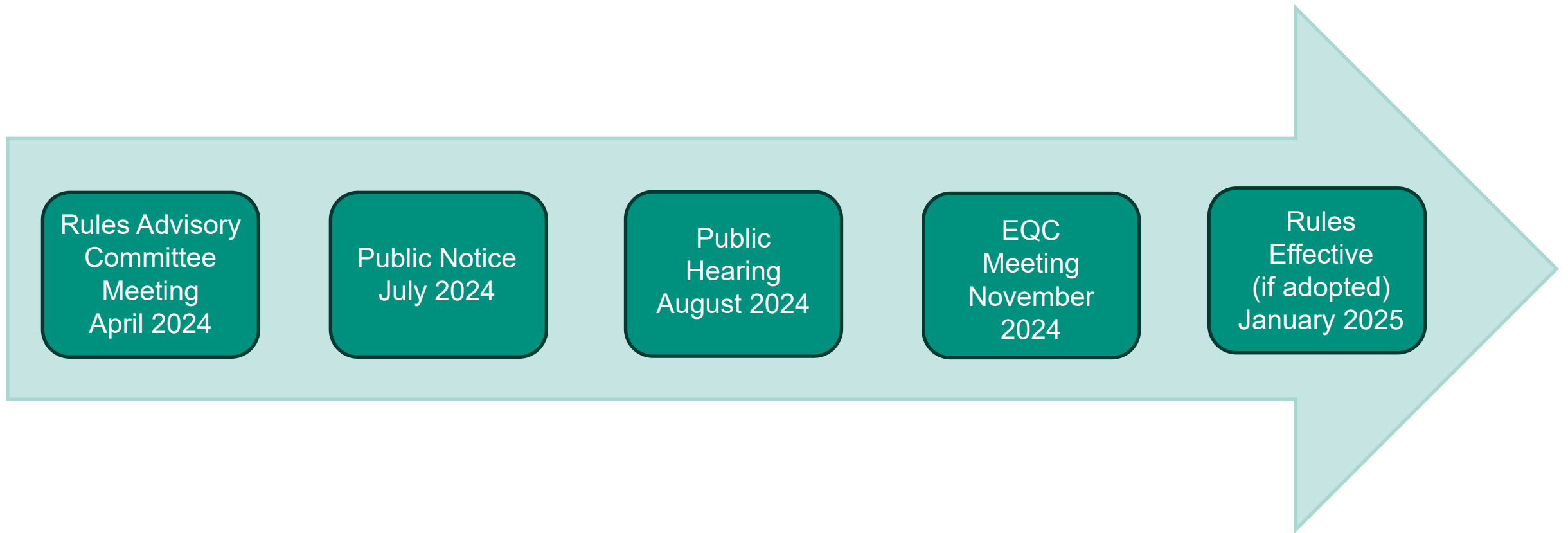
Proposed Rules: Compliance Extension

- Currently: up to 120-days
- If a wastewater treatment system classification increases the owner can request an extension **up to 365 days**
 - **If:**
 - Current operator has been employed at that system for at least one year
 - Certified at no more than one grade lower than the new classification of the system
 - No Class I permit violations

Other Proposed Rules

- Minor clarifications to existing rules
- Updates to reflect online submittals and communication in Your DEQ Online (YDO) versus paper applications
- “Operators that attain a higher grade certification than the classification of the system they are employed at may receive experience credit for working at a system corresponding to their certification level.”

Rulemaking Timeline



Title VI and alternative formats

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Thank you!
Questions?