GETTING AND MAINTAINING YOUR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR CERTIFICATION IN CALIFORNIA
Introduction

This guide is intended to be a public service of American Water College. The information provided was obtained from the California State Water Resources Control Board Drinking Water Operator Certification Program (SWRCB-DWOCP) and is believed to be accurate.

Throughout this resource, we have provided you with links to the source information. We encourage you to utilize these links to the SWRCB website as you work through the process of obtaining or renewing your California Water Distribution Operator Certification.

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/

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Water Distribution Operator Certification Overview

The water treatment industry is a noble profession. If you are reading this guide, you are either already serving in or are considering a career in a field which greatly contributes to the high degree of public health and quality of life we enjoy in this country. This first section gives you a basic overview of the process you can follow to get and maintain your Water Distribution Operator Certification in the state of California.

California Water Distribution Operator Certification is governed by the following state regulations:

- Operator Certification Regulations
- Drinking Water Operator Certification Statutes as amended via AB 2890

An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(c) must possess a distribution operator certificate or possess a treatment operator certificate and have appropriate training to make such decisions. An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(d) must possess either a distribution operator certificate or a treatment operator certificate.

To become certified as a water distribution operator, an applicant must:

1. Meet the minimum qualifications to take the exam
2. Submit the exam application with the applicable fee
3. Pass the applicable exam (minimum score of 70%)
4. Meet the minimum qualifications for certification
5. Submit the application for certification with applicable fee

American Water College offers COURSES to help you meet the education requirements and prepare to pass your certification exams the first time. Our exam preparation courses cover all the material you need to know. We use a proven system with the most effective training methods so you will go into your exam with the confidence you need to succeed. Click HERE to download your FREE copy of Certification Exam Tips.

The remainder of this guide outlines the education and experience requirements for you to get and maintain your Water Distribution Operator Certification.

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Grade 1 Requirements

Education Requirements

- Accredited High School diploma or GED*

* High school/GED equivalency for grades 1 and 2 ONLY can be fulfilled with 1 year as an operator of a facility that required an understanding of a piping system that included pumps, valves, and storage tanks.

Application for Examination

- Submit [APPLICATION FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR EXAMINATION](#) and fee to SWRCB-DWOCP

Work Experience Requirements

- No work experience requirements

Application for Certification

- After successfully passing an exam, you will receive a notice to apply for your certification. For Grades 1 and 2, simply complete and mail back the bottom portion of the pass notice with the proper fee to SWRCB-DWOCP.
- Applications for certification can be submitted up to three years after the date of the exam you passed.
Grade 2 Requirements

Education Requirements

- Accredited High School diploma or GED*

  AND

- One 36-contact-hour (3-unit) course of specialized training covering the fundamentals of water supply principles.

* High school/GED equivalency for grades 1 and 2 ONLY can be fulfilled with 1 year as an operator of a facility that required an understanding of a piping system that included pumps, valves, and storage tanks.

Application for Examination

- Submit APPLICATION FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR EXAMINATION and fee to SWRCB-DWOCP

Work Experience Requirements

- No work experience requirements

Application for Certification

- After successfully passing an exam, you will receive a notice to apply for your certification. For Grades 1 and 2, simply complete and mail back the bottom portion of the pass notice with the proper fee to SWRCB-DWOCP.

- Applications for certification can be submitted up to three years after the date of the exam you passed.

[Image of a smiling man wearing a hard hat]
Grade 3 Requirements

Education Requirements

- A valid grade D2 operator certificate.

  AND

- Two 36-contact-hour (3-unit) courses of specialized training, one of which is in fundamentals of water supply principles AND a second course in drinking water treatment.

Application for Examination

- Submit APPLICATION FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR EXAMINATION and fee to SWRCB-DWOCP

Examination and Work Experience Requirements

- Successful completion of the Water Distribution Operator Grade 3 (D3) operator examination within the three years prior to submitting the application for certification

  AND

- One year of operator experience working as a certified D2 operator, interim D3 or higher operator, or temporary D3 operator for a D2 system or higher or a system that prior to January 1, 2001 would have met the criteria for classification as a D2 system or higher

  AND

- At least one additional year of operator experience working as a distribution operator (may be substituted with (1) or (2) below)
Experience Substitutions

1. A relevant degree earned at an accredited academic institution may be substituted as follows:
   - Associate Degree or Certificate in Water or Wastewater Technology that includes at least 15 units of physical, chemical, or biological science may be used to fulfill 1 year of operator experience.
   - Bachelor Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental engineering, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 1.5 years of operator experience.
   - Master's Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 2 years of operator experience.

2. A certified operator may substitute, on a day-for-day basis, one additional year of operator experience working as a distribution operator with experience gained while working with lead responsibility for water quality or quantity related projects or research.

Application for Certification

- Applications for certification can be submitted up to three years after the date of the exam you passed. This allows you time to meet the experience requirements if necessary.
- Submit your completed Certification Application, filing fees and required documentation:
  - A signed and dated Supervisor Letter
  - Utility Organization Chart
  - System Classification Letter
  - Official Job Description(s) for the position(s) you held
Grade 4 Requirements

Education Requirements

- A valid grade D3 operator certificate.
- Three 36-contact-hour (3-unit) courses; two of which are in water supply principles. (The third course may be in drinking water treatment.)

Application for Examination

- Submit APPLICATION FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR EXAMINATION and fee to SWRCB-DWOCP

Examination and Work Experience Requirements

- Successful completion of the Grade D4 operator examination within the three years prior to submitting the application for certification
- At least one year of operator experience working as a certified D3 operator, interim D4 or higher operator, or temporary D4 operator for a D3 system or higher or a system that prior to January 1, 2001 would have met the criteria for classification as a D3 system or higher
- At least three additional years of operator experience working as a distribution operator (may be substituted with (1) or (2) below)
Experience Substitutions

1. A relevant degree earned at an accredited academic institution may be substituted as follows:
   - Associate Degree or Certificate in Water or Wastewater Technology that includes at least 15 units of physical, chemical, or biological science may be used to fulfill 1 year of operator experience.
   - Bachelor Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental engineering, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 1.5 years of operator experience.
   - Master’s Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 2 years of operator experience.

2. A certified operator may substitute, on a day-for-day basis, one additional year of operator experience working as a distribution operator with experience gained while working with lead responsibility for water quality or quantity related projects or research.

Application for Certification

- Applications for certification can be submitted up to three years after the date of the exam you passed. This allows you time to meet the experience requirements if necessary.
- Submit your completed Certification Application, filing fees and required documentation:
  - A signed and dated Supervisor Letter
  - Utility Organization Chart
  - System Classification Letter
  - Official Job Description(s) for the position(s) you held

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Grade 5 Requirements

Education Requirements

- A valid grade D4 operator certificate.
  AND
- Four 36-contact-hour (3-unit) courses of specialized training that includes at least two courses in water supply principles. (You may use a course in drinking water treatment as one of the additional two).

Application for Examination

- Submit APPLICATION FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR EXAMINATION and fee to SWRCB-DWOCP

Examination and Work Experience Requirements

- Successful completion of the Grade D5 operator examination within the three years prior to submitting the application for certification
  AND
- At least two years of operator experience working as a certified D4 operator, interim D5 or higher operator, or temporary D5 operator for a D4 or D5 system or higher or a system that prior to January 1, 2001 would have met the criteria for classification as a D4 or D5 system or higher
  AND
- At least three additional years of operator experience working as a distribution operator (may be substituted with (1) or (2) below)
Grade 5 Requirements (cont.)

Experience Substitutions

1. A relevant degree earned at an accredited academic institution may be substituted as follows:
   - Associate Degree or Certificate in Water or Wastewater Technology that includes at least 15 units of physical, chemical, or biological science may be used to fulfill 1 year of operator experience.
   - Bachelor Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental engineering, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 1.5 years of operator experience.
   - Master’s Degree in biology, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, environmental, microbiology, public health, and sanitary engineering may be used to fulfill 2 years of operator experience.

2. A certified operator may substitute, on a day-for-day basis, one additional year of operator experience working as a distribution operator with experience gained while working with lead responsibility for water quality or quantity related projects or research.

Application for Certification

- Applications for certification can be submitted up to three years after the date of the exam you passed. This allows you time to meet the experience requirements if necessary.

- Submit your completed Certification Application, filing fees and required documentation:
  - A signed and dated Supervisor Letter
  - Utility Organization Chart
  - System Classification Letter
  - Official Job Description(s) for the position(s) you held

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**Requirements**

In order to renew your certification, you must submit proof of completion for the number of continuing education contact hours as listed below. Acceptable drinking water courses must have been completed within the past 3 years of the Due Date listed on your renewal and not used on a prior renewal. You may use your contact hours for both distribution and treatment renewals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Contact Hours</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 Hours</td>
<td>16 Hours</td>
<td>24 Hours</td>
<td>36 Hours</td>
<td>36 Hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American Water College has conveniently bundled Continuing Education Packages to help you meet your renewal requirements. Just click on the number of hours you need in the table above or click HERE to select a course if you only need a few more hours.
Certification Renewal

Requirements

- Certifications must be renewed every three years
- Your certificate renewal form and payment are due four months prior to the certificate expiration date
  - A courtesy renewal reminder is mailed to your address of record approximately two months prior to your due date
  - It is your responsibility to pay the renewal fee and provide information regarding your continuing education on time even if you do not receive the renewal reminder
- Submit Renewal Form with:
  - Applicable renewal fee
  - Proof of the required number of continuing education hours during your renewal period

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