

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

WATER UTILITY OPERATOR LICENSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

January 4, 2019

9:00 a.m.

TCEQ

12100 Park 35 Circle, Bldg. E, Room 201S

Austin, Texas

Meeting Summary

Members Attending

Robb Starr
Paul Kite
Russell Hamilton
Rey Davila
Tanny Busby
Gary Sober
Kenneth Hutchins (via webcast/email)
Cory Moose (via webcast/email)
David Garza (via webcast/email)

Members Absent

Leonard Leinfelder
Donald Reese
Celia Eaves
Joseph McDaniel

Visitors Attending

David James

TCEQ Staff Attending

Jaya Zyman, PRS
Linda Saladino, PRS
Paul Munguia, PRS
Sarita Nazareth, PRS
Jenn Grossman, PRS
James Murphy, PRS
Tamara Calhoun, PRS
Dorothy Young, WSD
Leticia DeLeon, WSD
Paul Brochi, WQD

Call to order:

Quorum check - quorum present.

This meeting was webcast and members watching online were encouraged to email question and comments. This recording can be viewed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86ezd03kVVs>.

A motion to approve the meeting summary from October 18, 2018 was made by member Gary Sober and was seconded by member Tanny Busby, and all members approved.

Attendee introduction:

Round table introduction.

Water Supply Division (WSD) Updates: Leticia “Letty” DeLeon & Dorothy Young
WSD Updates - no new drinking water updates at this time. Old business - As requested from the 10/18/18 meeting, Letty provided the group with two documents: Water Hauler Guidance and Mobile Water Treatment Systems Guidance (both attached). If the committee has any questions after reviewing, they should email Paul Munguia to be addressed at the next WUOLAC meeting. Letty also informed the group about a training to be conducted to assist systems create an emergency preparedness and response plan. Dates planned for the training can be found on the [Drinking Water Advisory Work Group \(DWAAG\) website](#).

Dorothy Young, TCEQ WSD, reminded members about [TWICC \(Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee\)](#) and that meetings are held every other month. Dorothy gave her phone number (512-239-6064) to contact her with questions. Several funding agencies are present at the meetings. Next meeting will be held at North American Development Bank in San Antonio, TX on 1/16/2019 at 2:30pm.

Water Quality Division (WQD) Updates: Paul Brochi, WQD

WQD Updates - no new updates. Old business - Paul Brochi answered questions from the 10/18/18 meeting regarding water reuse & chlorination causing foaming in wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). He indicated that the chlorine residual in the WWTP effluent to be reused must be sufficient to kill the E. coli or fecal coliform (FC) to meet the Type I or Type II use standards in Chapter 210. These standards are based on the actual use and degree of human contact. Paul said that TCEQ would be open to discuss any issues that the WWTPs are having with meeting the chlorine residual limits when reusing the treated effluent within the plant to conserve water. Gary Sober indicated that, if the chlorine residual is too high, there are foaming issues associated with the destruction of healthy bacteria needed for treatment. The Chapter 210 rules were intended for use after chlorination. If reuse is occurring before the chlorine chamber, the Chapter 210 rules may not be applicable. Paul suggested that the best way to address these issues is to have Gary send a written request or set up a meeting with WQD, OCE, and PRS to review and respond to this challenge. Jaya Zyman, Director of PRS, offered to facilitate the meeting upon receiving Gary's request.

Paul Brochi also addressed questions regarding how WQD addresses new technology. He indicated that all new technology is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. WQD, along with the appropriate regional office, review data and pilot studies and issue approvals to ensure WWTPs can incorporate new technologies. Examples of new technology are BIOMAG (magnetic material to remove solids) and the creation of microorganisms to reduce sludge production (in this case, studies are still ongoing).

The group continued a discussion regarding the intent of Chapter 217 “Design Criteria for Domestic Wastewater Systems” and how the regional offices’ interpretation compares to the intent of the rule. Russell Hamilton stated his opinion that the most important factor is to ensure that the permit requirements, specifically the effluent discharge limits, were being met and not so much on how they are met. Jaya suggested that there could be some internal discussion between OCE, WQD and PRS about this issue as it relates to enforcement. Tanny & Russell cited instances in the Houston region where notice of violations (NOVs) are being

issued for operational violations. Tanny said that he would summarize this issue and send information to TCEQ and Jaya Zyman will reach out internally to obtain clarification.

Occupational Licensing (OL) Update – Tamara Calhoun, PRS-OL

Pre-approval of licensing applications had a direct impact on licensing exam numbers. There was a 6-month period between September 2016 and March 2017 where licensees could still take an exam without pre-approval. Starting March 2017, OL required all examinees to have pre-approved applications. There were 16.5% less exams administered during this timeframe. Between FY17 and FY18 the numbers recovered and increased by 22%. The 2nd quarter of each year tends to have lower numbers (December, January & February) due to holidays when applicants are not submitting applications and the TCEQ staff is not available to process the applications.

Tamara Calhoun provided handouts regarding water and wastewater operator licensing exam pass rates over multiple fiscal years along with the most recent quarter in FY19 (attached). Trends discussed: Higher level exams see more pass rate variance as there are fewer licensees testing. Therefore, these numbers can be significantly impacted by one or two licensees who may take multiple attempts to pass the exam or pass on the first attempt. The exam pass rates on the lower level exams (class C) show less variability for pass rates. Also, there are more consistent pass rates when comparing the pass rates over the full year versus quarterly, since there are fewer exams to consider quarterly. It was also noted that class D exam pass rates are dependent on the type of applicants entering the industry at the time. Competition for higher paying industry jobs can attract candidates away from the utility industry. One benefit of the utility industry is that there is a progression in the license levels that oftentimes translates into higher pay for every level an operator can move up to.

Rey asked for the pass rates of the Spanish exams. Linda Saladino explained that the numbers were collected by test set and not by language. Rey expressed a willingness to volunteer to help create more training manuals in Spanish and stated that TCEQ should consider translating higher level water and wastewater tests into Spanish. David Garza commented via email that he thought TCEX required 10 registrants to hold a Spanish training course. Linda said that she would include this as an agenda item for the next meeting and ask TCEX to attend so that they could discuss the topic of the availability of training and manuals in Spanish. In an effort to spread the word regarding the current available TCEQ exams, Russell Hamilton offered to include an announcement in the TWUA Journal each month if Jaya would send him the language in Spanish. Jaya said that she would get Small Business involved to prepare an article that is TCEQ approved. Dorothy with WSD suggested distributing flyers to the Office of Border Affairs. Jaya would like to determine if the Spanish exam numbers administered are low due to the lack of awareness the exams are available in Spanish or the demand is not at the level that was anticipated.

Russell Hamilton asked how the committee could target non-licensed operators. Some suggestions were contacts with Texas Municipal League (TML), high schools, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Rural Water Foundation, TCEQ Water Supply

Division, TCEQ's Office of Compliance and Enforcement (OCE) and their inspectors as well as TCEQ's Small Business & Local Government Assistance area.

Online Licensing Electronic Application (OLEA) Update --Tamara Calhoun (PRS-OL)

There have been 1,800 applications received since the October 11, 2018 official production launch of OLEA to the public. The application has proven to be a vast improvement over the original e-App by including supplemental forms and the payment within the application and thereby avoiding deficiencies and delays for applicants. Some internal programming issues occurred, but Occupational Licensing (OL) and the OLEA developers immediately addressed the issues and provided fixes. Several applicant (user) errors occurred as applicants tried to go around the "fail safes" programmed into OLEA to ensure TCEQ receives all the necessary information to process applications and avoid deficiencies and delays. For example, one of the common user errors is failing to tab through the fields on each page so that the information is saved, and the applicant can progress. Tamara Calhoun, along with the developers, will be considering some ideas to fix this issue while changing "Help" text within the application to further guide applicants.

Both applicants and preparers receive a series of emails to let everyone know the status of the application, i.e., after signing; after paying via ePay, after successfully submitting; and several notices before an application is deleted within 30 days. TCEQ cannot retrieve passwords, so the applicant will need to start a new application if they forget their password.

Question on current processing times: 3-4 weeks for new applications and 14 days for exams and renewal applications from the date received in the central office in Austin.

Question on conditional approval and status of applicants registering for exams: OLEA requires applicants wanting to test after a training event to upload a copy of their training registration and then TCEQ sends them the link to register for the exams; this also applies to applicants planning to retest at an event like a TWUA regional school. Applicants should contact OL at 512-239-6133 or by email at licenses@tceq.texas.gov to obtain the exam registration link if conditionally approved or retesting.

Reminder: online registration is required for retesting and new exam attempts (with an approved application) at all TCEQ regional offices.

Industry-Specific Training - Linda Saladino (PRS-OL)

Robb Starr continued a discussion from the 10/18/18 meeting regarding industry-specific training related to electrical and mechanical processes in wastewater systems. Russell Hamilton wanted to know why TCEQ allows electrical & mechanical experience to count as operator experience. Linda Saladino indicated that this experience is allowed in the wastewater operator licensing rules. As for water operator experience, the rules define work experience as the actual performance of job tasks in a public water supply system that are considered essential for the treatment or distribution of drinking water. The water operator experience supplemental forms have been revised to reflect these critical job tasks and are now built into OLEA. The group suggested that more information should be included in

training to cover some tasks involved with system maintenance. Robb Starr suggested that TEEEX be invited to the next meeting as Robb had contacted them in the past to offer this type of training.

Wrap-Up Discussion:

RG-002: Process Control Tests for Wastewater Treatment Facilities – Sarita Nazareth, PRS-OL

RG-002 was originally developed by the Water Quality Division (WQD), the Occupational Licensing Section, the Office of Enforcement and Compliance (OCE) and WUOLAC with the intent to serve as a guidance document for operation of WWTPs rather than a regulatory tool. Tanny was drafting a document to further explain the process control tests described in RG-002 and will share with the group for comments once complete. Tanny included a rationale for the process control tests including their purpose. Linda will find out if it is appropriate to change the regulatory guidance to a general information document. Also, she suggested that Tanny's document be included as an appendix to the current RG-002. Gary suggested that some information about the equipment available to perform the tests in the document should be included, ex., using test strips for monitoring.

Basic Water Works Operations Curriculum -- James Murphy, PRS-OL

James asked the group if there may be too much information to be covered in the Basic Water Works curriculum. The group did not suggest additional topics but felt that the time for topics was dependent upon who is in the class at the time. The new TEEEX manuals have a less extensive glossary of terms and some members suggested that the old glossary was better.

The committee suggested that more time needed to be allotted for calculations and disinfection. The time frames referenced in the curriculum are only suggestions and can be adjusted based on the students' needs completing the courses. James requested some suggestions about where the training could be trimmed back to add more information/time for the calculations and disinfection topics. Russell and Gary suggested that there should be more questions on the exams related to calculations and disinfection to encourage training on the subjects. Linda reiterated that these topics are currently included on licensing exams and the curriculum is a way to communicate with all training providers about what the emphasis should be in the Basic Water course to assist operators be compliant. Letty DeLeon with WSD suggested changing the weighting of exam questions for critical topics the operators need to know. For instance, interpreting sampling results, disinfection, and calculations.

Paul Kite, member, suggested lead and copper also be included in the curriculum. Dorothy Young, with WSD, stated that training was available through their Financial, Managerial, and Technical (FMT) contractors and Directed Assistance Modules (DAM) related to lead and copper. These training materials may be used or incorporated as appropriate for lead and copper. It was suggested that the technology or knowledge needed to run the water system makes the class D license obsolete; however, the TCEQ staffing rules do not require higher than a class D license in some cases for small systems; therefore, some operators will not upgrade unless it is required.

Adjourn

The group met in a closed meeting to discuss specific occupational licensing exam topics.