

# Operator certification requirements for public water systems in Kansas

Since 1975, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has administered a mandatory water and wastewater operator certification program. State law requires all water supply systems and wastewater treatment facilities to be under the supervision of a certified operator. Water supply systems in Kansas, particularly the small systems, face an ever-increasing challenge of recruiting and keeping personnel who are certified at an appropriate level to meet the requirements set forth by KDHE. Often there are misunderstandings regarding the level of certification required to operate a particular system. Operators at times have difficulty understanding the education, training and experience requirements.

A water supply system is defined as the pipes, structures and facilities used to obtain, treat or distribute water to the public for use by humans. In Kansas, water systems are grouped into five different categories ranging from Small System to Class IV systems. The classification of a water system depends on two factors: the type of treatment and population. A water system is classified as a Small System if it serves a population of less than 500 persons while having only a distribution system or chlorinating groundwater. A water system is classified as a Class IV system if the system chlorinates

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groundwater only and serves a population of greater than 20,000 persons or has treatment of groundwater or surface water and serves a population of more than

competent in the class of system he or she is operating. In order to obtain the proper level of certification an operator must meet the requirements including the number of years of experience required for the particular class they wish to obtain. Certification

to operate a Small System requires a minimum of six months on the job experience. Class I and Class II certifications require at least one year of on the job experience while Class II and Class IV require two years experience.

The years of experience requirement for operators is only one aspect of the certification program. There are point requirements that must be met as well. Points are given based on education and experience. Every year of experience counts as one point toward certification. A high school diploma or general equivalency degree is worth 12 points. An operator can obtain one point towards certification for every year of college or 30 semester hours. The Small System certification requires the fewest number of points at 12.5. The



10,000 persons. The system classification chart accompanying this article offers further details of the different types of system classification.

The certified operator program provides five different certification levels, one for each class of facility. The program is designed to assure that the operator is

Class I certificate requires 13 points while the Class II certificate requires 14 points. Class III and Class IV require 16 points and 18 points respectively. The chart at right shows the requirements for experience and training requirements.

Refer to the chart. Suppose an operator is hired by a water system having a surface water treatment plant and a population of 3,000 people. This system would be classified as a Class III water treatment facility. Suppose the new operator is a high school graduate and has worked in another water treatment plant for the last four years. With the current point system, the high school diploma is worth 12 points while the four years of operating experience total up to four points. This gives the operator a total of 16 points. A Class III operator in Kansas needs a total of 16 points with a minimum of two years experience. The new operator meets all of the requirements and is qualified to take the Class III water operator examination.

The best preparation for the examination is experience. It is also generally recommended that an operator complete a course of study to familiarize themselves with different aspects of operations that they may not experience in their particular system. The Kansas Rural Water Association also offers numerous training opportunities at locations across the state, year round. These training opportunities are often offered at no cost. Those planning to take the operator exam might also browse the KRWA Web site to review questions that are typical on operator certification exams. You can find the online quizzes under the "training" link or by typing this address into your browser: [www.krwa.net/quiz/](http://www.krwa.net/quiz/). KRWA will be expanding the online quizzes in the coming weeks.

Public Water System Classifications; Operator Training/Experience			
CLASS	DESCRIPTION	POP.	YEARS / POINTS
Small System	1. Distribution System Only 2. Chlorination of Groundwater Only	All <501	6 MONTHS 12.5 POINTS
I	1. Chlorination of Groundwater Only 2. Treatment of Groundwater	501-1,500 <501	1 YEAR 13 POINTS
II	1. Chlorination of Groundwater Only 2. Treatment of Groundwater 3. Treatment of Surface Water	1,501-5,000 501-2,500 <2,501	1 YEAR 14 POINTS
III	1. Chlorination of Groundwater Only 2. Treatment of Groundwater or Surface Water	5,001-20,000 2,501-10,000	2 YEARS 16 POINTS
IV	1. Chlorination of Groundwater Only 2. Treatment of Groundwater or Surface Water	>20,000 >10,000	2 YEARS 18 POINTS

*Remember to mark your calendars for the KRWA Annual Conference March 27-29, 2007*

*It's the 40<sup>th</sup> annual!*