

Nevada Certified Drinking Water Operator's Forum Minutes

Summary minutes of the meeting of June 24, 2009

The meeting began at 10:05 a.m. in the Nevada Department of Conservation 2nd floor Conference Room, 901 S. Stewart Street, Carson City, Nevada.

Videoconference to: NDEP Las Vegas Office, and Great Basin College
Red Rock Conference Room 1500 College Parkway
2030 E. Flamingo Rd., Suite 230 Lundberg Hall, Room 114
Las Vegas, NV Elko, NV

Phone conference to: 1-888-363-4734, access code 1515199

1. Call to Order (Chairman Cameron McKay) and introductions

Members Present: Cameron McKay (Chairman); Harvey Johnson; Bob Foerster; John Hulett; Lynn Forsberg (Elko video-conference); Marcellus Jones (Las Vegas video-conference)

Members absent: Chet Auckley

Representing the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP), Bureau of Safe Drinking Water (BSDW): Jennifer Carr, Bureau Chief; and Nan Paulson, Administrative Assistant

Telephone attendance: Gina Enriquez (AWWA); Ron Zegers (SNWA)

Guests: Steve Brockway (retired 5/8/09 from NDEP BSDW); Kathy Brockway; Crystel Montecinos (Tigren, Inc.); Dawne Baker (AWWA), Zoya Kirsanov (AWWA); Ron Penrose (TMWA); Jim Kerr (Elko County); and Tom Georgi (LVVWD)

2. Approval of Minutes – March 11, 2009 Meeting

Motion: Bob Foerster moved to approve the minutes as presented, the motion was seconded by Harvey Johnson, and the vote was unanimous in favor.

3. Recognition of Service- Steve Brockway

Steve Brockway retired May 8, 2009 from BSDW. Chairman McKay thanked Steve for his work with the Water Operators and wished him a happy retirement. He also acknowledged Steve's history to the audience. Some of Steve's stated accomplishments included:

Steve began with the Health Division as a contract employee in 1988, and in 1990 he became a full-time employee of the State.

In 1992, he started work with the Certification Program and has had a distinguished career in helping Nevada's operators with their individual pursuits for distribution and treatment certification.

His experience in operating water systems prior to coming to Nevada served him well and he had a great ability to build relationships with rural Nevada operators. Operators out there know Steve's name.

Steve has been a valued participant with the former Operator Certification Advisory Board that is now the Nevada Certified Drinking Water Operator's Forum.

Steve will be missed, both professionally for his institutional memory, his contributions to the Forum and the State, and more importantly, he will be missed personally by all who had the opportunity and good fortune to work with him over the years.

4. Report on Exam Analysis, March 2009 – (AWWA & NDEP)

The test analysis was presented as provided for the new ABC exam format. Chairman McKay stated that the analysis for each test is very valuable. Jennifer Carr said the information is useful for the training coalition. Bob Foerster suggested the overall points in each category should be compared as more testing is done to see if the numbers change from test to test.

The general consensus of the Forum members is that they like the format of this information and it will be beneficial to post on-line. The analysis will be re-scanned and put on the web after the items with significant percentages of "Not Mastered" values are highlighted. The operators will see which areas need to be studied more before taking the exams.

5. Individual Diagnostic Report for Operators

An individual report will be included in the cost of each test, per Dawne Baker. These will be mailed to the operators with their test result letters. Gina Enriquez added that it takes 2-3 weeks for the results to be received from ABC.

6. Exam Exit Poll Summary – March 2009 Exam (Bob Foerster)

From the March exam, 142 questionnaires were received. Not everyone responded. The results showed: Exam Preparation Time: 1st time test takers had a median study time of 12 hours, the average was 19 hours over 3.7 weeks. 2nd time test takers had a median study time of 12 hours, the average was 17 hours over 4 weeks.

The Forum members were concerned over the low number of hours operators spent studying. Post test information shows that operators need to take testing more seriously, and this needs to be communicated to them. Bob Foerster will write an article to post in Waterlines and BSDW will post information onto the Forum Webpage.

In the last section of the questionnaire, operators were asked if they protested some of the questions, there was a strong Yes answer. Cameron McKay said it would be good to know which questions were difficult to understand, such as Math. He added that many of the operators have Bachelor's and Master's degrees so they should have better study habits. Some operators may be taking the exams just to see what is on it without studying the first time around.

Some discussion was made regarding allowances from employers for study time on the job. Bob Foerster said he would like to know how operators studied. Did they study alone, with a partner, or a combination of both? Chairman McKay said he would like to see employers allow for test study time on the job.

7. Exam Process Improvement – Meeting Report (Ron Penrose and Jennifer Carr)

Ms. Carr advised the Forum that the software transition is finally complete and BSDW staff is working on getting the backlog of work up to date. She added that the March certificates were signed and were in the process to be mailed.

Ron announced that the March testing had minimal glitches and that there are now proctors in Fallon and West Wendover. The Fallon proctor is a City employee and the W. Wendover proctor is the Fire Chief so Fallon testing should be available for a while.

Improvements in the testing process showed that it had limited flexibility for the operators and the staff who manage the tests. Ron Penrose decided to go back to the previous way of testing, which included having extra tests available in case of human or database error.

One of the issues Mr. Penrose would like to see a change in is testing dates. Operators have a very limited time to apply for another test after learning their scores.

Jennifer Carr confirmed that with results coming out 30 days after the tests, operators have only 2 weeks to apply to retest or test for an upgrade. She added that the December test was eliminated because the renewal processing consumes a lot of time. At Ron's request, the Division will look at moving June's test into July, and September's test date into October to help operators with the application process.

Another concern is that many applications are incomplete. Jennifer Carr brought up the issue of the Division needing to be more stringent on time lines and application quality. Some operators do not read or comply with the requirements by not listing their experience when it is required.

Jennifer is considering updating BSDW's application forms to provide space for additional detail so that the operators can more clearly document what they do, and why they believe they qualify for an exam. This will reduce phone calls and questions from BSDW.

Jennifer discussed "raising the bar" for applicants – being firm with application deadlines and working to improve the quality of application forms for everyone's benefit. Many of the applications have been hard to process and some proctor notification letters have come back to Ron as undeliverable because an operator's address has changed!

One idea is to have supervisor's endorse the applications and verify they are accurate and correct before they are sent in.

8. Operator contact information confidentiality (Jennifer)

In the past few months, a water system was recruiting for operators; they requested a particular data set. Jennifer said she vetted them to ensure the third party was legit before releasing the information. The data BSDW has is public record, but she received three telephone calls with questions or complaints from operators as to why they were getting recruiting calls; a couple people appreciated the opportunity.

Jennifer asked what the general expectation for confidentiality of operator information is? And, is there anything that the Forum would like BSDW to consider in the future?

Harvey Johnson said the Wastewater applications have a box to check regarding sharing of the information and possible preference on mailing.

Bob Foerster said he believed there is a Final EPA Red Flag Rule that addresses consumer protection related to water systems. Chairman McKay stated that he would not want his telephone numbers given out. Lynn Forsberg concurred that although they might work for a public entity, and expect certain information to be public, he would not want his email given out.

9. Operator Qualifications (Jennifer)

Since Steve retired, Jennifer has been processing applications. Without the benefit of Steve's program history, she has had to refer regularly to the regulations and she has some questions; especially since the Forum was the entity that worked to develop the regulations in the past; their feedback on a few items would be appreciated:

1) The regulations allow for "not more than one half of the required experience" to be satisfied by college education in science or engineering. Regulations also allow for "not more than one half of the experience in operating" to come from experience gained from wastewater treatment or a related field. There is not an "and" or an "or" related to these two, so technically, it appears that someone could get a treatment certificate from education and wastewater treatment experience alone. What are the thoughts of the Forum on this?

The Forum responded that the intent was to have one-half of the experience come from one or the other alternate allowance, not both.

2) "Operator Experience" is defined as "the daily performance of activities that consist of the control or oversight of any process or operation at a water treatment facility or in a water distribution system that may affect the quality or quantity of water." Jennifer said she has reviewed a few exam applications from operators that do not appear to clearly have "operator experience."

Jennifer has been working with the LVVWD to resolve the experience issue so that they can help their D's to become T's at the entry level.

One example is that there is an existing D-2 that has applied for a D-3. His current position is as a construction engineer – so he does have field experience in construction inspection and related construction coordination work (in this case, KSA's also include "operation of water systems"). Jennifer asked for feedback from the Forum on thoughts or feelings they may have related to the intent behind the definition of "Operator Experience" and the amount of "hands-on" water system work it equates to, especially as operators increase in grade?

Chairman McKay said the operators should have hands-on experience. Bob Foerster added that there should be some flexibility such as interim experience combined with education and other experience. Harvey Johnson supported the idea of more flexibility in Distribution related to construction experience, but not with treatment. Treatment experience was described as being very "hands-on". Ron Zegers interjected that everyone needs to be cognizant of what "hands-on" means. Sometimes Engineers or a water system's laboratory personnel will set operational directives even though the field operator does the work. There needs to be clarity in what each person does.

3) Operational experience must come from a facility at the grade or no more than one grade below the certification being sought by an applicant (i.e. if they want a D-3 they have to have experience operating a D-3 or a D-2 facility). Jennifer said she is not clear that BSDW has rigorously enforced these evaluation criteria because when she has brought it up to some applicants, she gets a wide variety of reasons why they (or someone they know) is qualified. Over the next couple of years, staff will be working to ensure all our facilities are properly graded and that data will be in our database. Jennifer will be improving the application review process related to these criteria.

4) Secondary education is something that has been discussed here and at the Training Coalition – Jennifer is working on clarifying what (specifically) qualifies and which educational programs have IACET approval. This also will help to satisfy the needs of operators when they are looking for courses to take. This will continue as a “special project” for Steve’s replacement.

Zoya Kirsanov noted that as of January 2007, any classes outside of Water College are no longer IACET approved under the AWWA umbrella. Dawne Baker further stated that they must now be teaching for the Water College to be covered by the AWWA IACET process.

10. Member’s Open Comments:

John Hulett mentioned the NRWA has helped his water system by having on site training. He encouraged others to use them for training.

Jennifer noted that there were regulation amendment workshops that afternoon in the same location in Carson City. The regulations adopt LT2, Stage 2 and do various other cleanups for primacy and other reasons.

John asked about the Ground Water Rule. Jennifer said BSDW was going to do more outreach soon, by mail. She added that there had not yet been adoption of a regulation for it but there would be regulations drafted within a year.

11. Public Comments

There were none.

12. Schedule 2009 Meetings –

September 16, 2009 before Tri-State, which is September 22-24 in Primm, NV, and December 10, 2009

13. Adjourn Suggested by: Cameron McKay; 2nd by: John Hulett; Time: 11:35 a.m.