1. Is the wastewater operator certification program mandatory or voluntary?

The wastewater operator certification program is a mandatory program. This means that each wastewater treatment facility in Illinois is required to be operated by a wastewater operator who is certified at or above the certification level required for the treatment facility. However, a voluntary certification program for collection system operators is being implemented. Since this is a voluntary program, it means that a certified collection system operator is not required to operate a collection system, although it is strongly recommended by the Agency.

2. How are wastewater treatment facilities classified in Illinois?

Wastewater treatment facilities are classified as either municipal or industrial facilities.

Municipal wastewater treatment facilities are classified in one of four groups as follows:

Group 4 - Lagoon treatment systems. Group 4 facilities require a wastewater operator certified at the Class 4 or higher level (Class 3, Class 2, or Class 1).

Group 3 - Fixed film processes and Imhoff tank systems with a design average flow (DAF) of less than 1.0 MGD, and all primary treatment systems. Group 3 facilities require a wastewater operator certified at the Class 3 or higher level (Class 2, or Class 1).

Group 2 - Activated sludge systems with a design average flow (DAF) of less than 1.0 MGD. Group 2 facilities require a wastewater operator certified at the Class 2 or higher level (Class1).

Group 1 - All domestic wastewater treatment systems 1.0 MGD DAF or more, excluding lagoon systems and primary treatment systems. Group 1 facilities require a wastewater operator certified at the Class 1 level.

Group K Industrial wastewater treatment facilities require Class K certified wastewater operators. Group K facilities shall consist of industrial wastewater treatment works, pretreatment works, domestic wastewater treatment works owned and operated by industries, and spray irrigation that is collected and discharged.

3. What are the wastewater operator certification levels available in Illinois?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>Class 4 (lowest level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class 1 (highest level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial (Class K)</td>
<td>Facility-Specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General (Water Remediation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operator-In-Training</td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection System Operator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. What are the eligibility requirements for each certification level?

Class 4  
1 year wastewater operating experience and high school education or equivalent

Class 3  
3 years wastewater operating experience and high school education or equivalent

Class 2  
6 years wastewater operating experience and high school education or equivalent

Class 1  
8 years wastewater operating experience and high school education or equivalent

Class K  
Active supervision and/or operation of an industrial wastewater treatment facility

Operator-In-Training Basic  
3 months wastewater operating experience or 1 wastewater course

Operator-In-Training Intermediate  
1 year wastewater operating experience

Operator-In-Training Advanced  
3 years wastewater operating experience and high school education or equivalent

Collection System Operator  
1 year collection system operating experience and high school education or equivalent

5. Are there any substitutions that can be used to help satisfy the eligibility requirements?

Yes, for the Class 3, Class 2, and Class 1 certification levels, up to 50% of the total requirement may be combined credit received for completed wastewater courses, college credits, and related collection system or public water supply operating experience.

The Class 4 level receives 3 months substitution credit for a high school diploma or GED, and up to 6 months credit for wastewater courses. The only time college credit can be applied toward Class 4 eligibility is upon the successful completion of a one-year college program specifically designed for wastewater treatment works operation, which includes actual operation of a wastewater treatment works, and may be substituted for a maximum of one year wastewater operator experience, such as with the program offered through ERTC at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

For collection system operator certification, 3 months substitution credit for high school diploma or GED and up to 6 months credit may be granted for completion of collection system courses and/or wastewater courses, and/or for wastewater operating experience, or any combination of substitute credits, not to exceed 6 months.

6. What is a wastewater operator?

A wastewater operator is a person who regularly makes recommendations or is responsible for process control decisions at a wastewater treatment facility. The term does not apply to persons whose duties are limited solely to laboratory testing or maintenance, or to other persons who exercise general or indirect supervision only.
7. What is wastewater operating experience?

Wastewater operating experience is time spent performing the hands-on operational duties of a wastewater treatment works operator, which includes direct hands-on physical operation of wastewater treatment equipment and/or wastewater treatment processes, direct active field supervision of wastewater treatment equipment and/or wastewater treatment processes, and/or direct and active involvement in process control decisions for wastewater treatment processes. At this time, wastewater operator experience may be acquired at either municipal or industrial wastewater treatment facilities.

8. What does NOT count as hand-on wastewater operating experience?

Public works, street maintenance, meter reading, operating a Vactor truck, sludge hauling/handling and/or application, janitorial, grounds keeping, collection systems and/or drinking water operations, laboratory testing, electrical and/or maintenance mechanic work.

9. What is related experience?

Related experience is experience operating collection systems or drinking water supplies or laboratory or maintenance experience at a wastewater treatment facility. Partial credit toward eligibility will be given once hands-on wastewater operating experience is obtained.

10. What is a wastewater course?

A wastewater course is defined as a course consisting of 3 quarter hours, or 2 semester hours, or 30 contact hours, or 3.0 continuing education units (CEUs) and must cover one or more aspects of wastewater treatment such as wastewater collection, treatment, operations, maintenance, or management from an accredited college, university, or technical vocational and trade school that is approved by the Agency. Training events that meet this definition will receive 3 months of credit toward the certification eligibility requirements. Training events which do not meet this definition will receive credit at the same rate as college/university courses.

The amount of credit that may be given for wastewater courses is dependent on the level of certification being sought. The maximum credit for wastewater courses per certification level is given below. Any wastewater courses which cannot be credited at the 3 month rate will be credited at the same rate as college university courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification Level</th>
<th>Maximum Credit for Wastewater Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>24 months (8 wastewater courses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>124 months (4 wastewater courses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>6 months (2 wastewater courses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>6 months (2 wastewater courses)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. How is credit applied if my job duties consist of both wastewater operating experience and related experience?

If your job duties consist of both wastewater operating experience and related experience, credit is assessed based on the percentage of time spent performing each type of duties. If 50% or more of time at work is
classified as wastewater operating experience, full credit is given for wastewater operating experience and zero credit is given for related experience. If less than 50% of time at work is classified as wastewater operating experience, half credit is given for wastewater operating experience and half credit is given for related experience.

12. How many hours per week must be worked to be considered full-time and/or part-time?

30 hours or more per week is considered full-time employment and may be given full credit toward eligibility determination. Less than 30 hours per week is considered part-time employment and may be given partial credit toward eligibility determination. Less than 30 hours but greater than 10 hours per week may be given 50% credit toward eligibility determination. If the number of hours worked is 10 hours or less per week, then only 25% credit toward eligibility determination will be given.

13. How often and where are wastewater examinations offered?

Examinations are offered every month at 3 to 4 sites around the state. In the Greater Chicago metropolitan area an exam is offered every month. In all other areas of the state, exams are offered every other month. At times, additional special exams may be offered. Generally, exams are offered at Agency regional office facilities. Exceptions are the Greater Chicago metropolitan area, the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area, and special exams; all of which utilize non-Agency sites.

14. How do I obtain wastewater certification?

The necessary steps to become certified are:

- Submit a completed application to the wastewater Operator Certification Unit. Applications are available from the Operator Certification Unit or online.
- Application is reviewed and applicant is sent either an examination admittance letter or a letter indicating experience credit given and the amount of eligibility shortfall.
- Obtain a score of 70 on a certification examination.

15. To become certified at a particular level, must I work up to that level by passing the examinations for all of the lower certification levels?

No, you may take any examination that you are eligible for. You do not have to pass the lower level examinations first.

16. If I am eligible for two different Class levels (ie. Class 2 and Class 1), can I take an exam for each Class level at the same time?

No, you are allowed a maximum of three hours to complete the exam. Currently there are 100 questions per exam. To ensure there is adequate time to complete the exam without rushing through the questions, only one exam can be taken at a time.
17. How many questions are on each exam?

Currently the Collection Systems, the Class 4, Class 3, Class 2 and the Class 1 exam have 100 questions each. The industrial Class K (facility-specific) exam has a total of 15 questions, 5 multiple choice and 10 short answer/essay. The industrial Class K-WR (general) exam has a total of 14 questions, 7 multiple choice and 7 short answer/essay.

18. If I fail an examination, how long must I wait to retake it?

There is no minimum period you must wait before you can retake an examination. You can take an examination the next time it is offered, once you have received your examination results notification letter.

19. Can I schedule to take an examination for the same certification level on more than one examination date?

No, you may only schedule for one examination date and location at a time. If you are scheduled for an examination, you may not schedule to take the same examination again until after you receive your examination results notification letter. The number of examinees that can be accommodated at each examination site is limited and if an individual schedules at more than one examination, it denies someone else the opportunity to take an examination.

If you are scheduled for an examination and after scheduling, find out you will not be able to attend as planned, you may contact the Operator Certification Unit to change your scheduled examination date.

20. Can I just show up at an examination site and take an examination?

No, you must first be determined eligible to take an examination. Eligibility is determined through the application process described above. In addition, each examination site will accommodate only a certain number of examinees and, even if you are eligible, there is no guarantee that there will be room for you. All scheduling for examinations will be done on a first-come first-served basis through the Operator Certification Unit. If you show up at an examination site and your name is not on the exam roster and you don’t have an admittance letter, you will be turned away.

21. Can I take a certification examination before I meet the eligibility requirements for that certification level?

No, you must satisfy the eligibility requirements for a particular certification level before you will be allowed to take the corresponding examination.

22. What is the purpose of the Operator-In-Training certificates?

The Operator-In-Training Basic certificate is intended to recognize individuals who are just beginning a career in the wastewater treatment field. This examination stresses basic general knowledge of wastewater treatment processes. The Operator-In-Training Intermediate and Advanced certificates are intended to provide an alternative route for obtaining Class 2 certification for operators at activated sludge facilities located in large metropolitan areas. These examinations stress the activated sludge treatment processes rather than the treatment
processes included on the Class 4 and Class 3 examinations since these operators are not familiar with the operation of lagoons, trickling filters, packed towers, etc.

23. Can an individual with an Operator-In-Training certificate be considered as the properly certified operator for a wastewater treatment facility?

No, the properly certified operator for a particular wastewater treatment facility must be certified at a level equal to or higher than the certification level required for that facility. An Operator-In-Training certificate does not meet this requirement.

24. Does the properly certified wastewater operator need to be present at the wastewater treatment facility all the time that it is in operation?

The properly certified operator must exercise direct and active field supervision of the wastewater treatment facility. Situations will dictate whether or not the physical presence of the properly certified operator is required on site. However in all situations, it is expected that the properly certified operator have sufficient knowledge of the treatment facility to handle any situation expeditiously and correctly.

25. What is the difference between the general Class K-WR and the facility-specific Class K certificates?

The general Class K certificate, also referred to as a Class K-WR (Water Remediation), is intended only for treatment or pretreatment facilities which treat groundwater contaminated with gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, fuel oil, and/or kerosene. Most of these facilities are associated with entities which store petroleum fuels underground, such as gas stations. The main treatment process involved is either air stripping or activated carbon canister. Facilities treating groundwater contaminated with other substances, such as solvents, require facility-specific Class K certification. An operator who holds Class K-WR certification may operate any treatment or pretreatment facility in Illinois which treats groundwater contaminated with gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, fuel oil, and/or kerosene.

A facility-specific Class K certificate, as the name implies, is issued for the operation of the specific industrial wastewater treatment or pretreatment facility for which the operator wrote the examination. An operator, with a facility-specific Class K certificate, who leaves the facility in which he is certified, to operate another industrial wastewater treatment or pretreatment facility, must apply for and pass the Class K examination for the second industrial wastewater treatment or pretreatment facility in order to be properly certified for the second facility. In addition, an operator who holds a facility-specific Class K industrial wastewater treatment or pretreatment facility which is upgraded to include additional and/or different treatment processes than the original facility must apply for and pass the Class K examination for the upgraded industrial wastewater treatment or pretreatment facility in order to be properly certified for the upgraded facility.

26. If I hold a municipal certification, such as a Class 1, can I operate an industrial facility without taking a Class K exam?

No, municipal and industrial wastewater treatment works have different operating requirements which are spelled out in the operating and discharge permits held by the facilities. Industrial facilities require a facility-specific Class K operator certified for operations at that specific facility. (See Item #25 above.)
27. Do I need to notify the Agency if I change my name or home address, or if I begin or terminate employment with a wastewater treatment works facility?

Yes, whenever a certified operator begins or terminates employment with a wastewater treatment works or pretreatment works, the employee/operator and the owner of the facility must notify the Agency of any changes in writing within 7 days. An operator must notify the Agency within 30 days of any change in name and/or home address.

A Change in Personnel Notification Form can be found on the Agency website at: http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/forms.html then click on Operator Certification-Wastewater.

28. How long is a wastewater certificate in effect? Do wastewater certificates have to be renewed?

There is no renewal requirement for wastewater operator certificates at the present time. Currently, a wastewater operator certificate has no expiration date. There are two ways a certified operator may become uncertified. One is that an operator may voluntarily return his certification to the Operator Certification Unit. The other is that the Agency may revoke an operator’s certificate due to improper actions performed by the operator in the course of operating a wastewater treatment facility. It should be noted that although there is no renewal requirement for wastewater certificates at the present time, this does not preclude the institution of wastewater certificate renewal at some point in the future.

29. Are there any fees associated with wastewater operator certification?

There are no fees associated with wastewater operator certification at the present time. However, this does not preclude the institution of wastewater certification fees at some point in the future.

30. Is there any continuing education requirement associated with wastewater operator certification?

There is no continuing education requirement associated with wastewater operator certification at the present time. However, this does not preclude the institution of a continuing education requirement for wastewater operator certification in the future.

31. Does Illinois have reciprocity with wastewater certifying authorities from any other states?

Yes, depending on the reciprocal state. The certifying state’s rules and regulations, in conjunction with an individual’s education and employment qualifications, are used to determine the specific Illinois certificate that can be issued. However, according to Illinois regulations, if another state does not accept Illinois’ program for reciprocity, then Illinois cannot accept that state for reciprocity. It should be noted that, due to the uniqueness of Illinois’ industrial certification program, it is not possible to consider issuing Class K certificates by reciprocity. Collection system certification is also not considered through reciprocity as it is a voluntary certification. (See Item #1 above.)
32. Can the Agency "discipline" wastewater operators?

Yes, the Agency can "discipline" wastewater operators through the certificate sanction process. Potential causes for sanctions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Obtaining or attempting to obtain certification by fraud or deceit.
- Gross negligence or gross misconduct in the operation of a wastewater treatment facility or pretreatment facility.
- Falsification of records and reports that are required by the Environmental Protection Act or any rules promulgated under it.
- Willful failure to maintain records and reports that are required by the Environmental Protection Act or any rules promulgated under it.
- Willful non-submission of records and reports that are required by the Environmental Protection Act or any rules promulgated under it.
- Willful violation of the Environmental Protection Act or any rules that are promulgated under it.
- A final judgment in a civil action or a conviction in a criminal action that an operator has performed any of the acts listed above.

Sanctions include, but are not limited to, prohibition of application for certification, probation, suspension, and revocation.

33. What does it mean if my wastewater certificate is suspended?

A suspended wastewater certificate is considered invalid during the suspension period. A certificate may be suspended for a period of up to 18 months. Experience obtained during the suspension period will not be considered for credit toward meeting certification eligibility requirements. At the end of the suspension period, the certificate is again considered valid. Experience obtained after the suspension is lifted will be considered for credit toward meeting certification eligibility requirements.

34. What does it mean if my wastewater certificate is revoked?

A revoked certificate is considered invalid. The operator may not reapply for any certificate for a period of not less than 18 months and not more than 4 years. Experience obtained during the revocation is not considered for credit toward meeting certification eligibility requirements. At the end of the revocation period, an operator must apply for and pass the certification examination for the desired level of certification to become certified as a wastewater operator again.