

# Elevating the Profession of a Water Operator

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“Why is it Important for Operators

to Provide Accurate Information on Official Government Records?”

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**W**ater operators protect public health on a daily basis by properly maintaining and operating water treatment systems. State agencies require operators to be certified to ensure that they possess the technical competency to perform their duties without endangering public health. In addition to displaying technical competency, operators must also perform duties such as accurate record keeping.

It is important for operators to provide accurate information on official government records, especially on the New York State Department of Health (Department) Monthly Operation Reports. Why? Firstly, if it is determined that the information was falsely provided to the Department, the operator's certification could be suspended and/or revoked, and the operator could be subject to fines up to \$2,000 per violation, as well as face federal prosecution. Secondly and most importantly, the operator could be jeopardizing the health of the customers he/she serves by providing false information.

In fact, currently there is a pending case against a New York State Water Treatment Operator for falsifying an official document. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) initiated an enforcement action against this operator for recording a false turbidity result without taking the

appropriate sample. EPA was recently also involved in a similar case with a water operator in Tennessee, who falsified a chlorine residual result on an official government document. The defendant, in this case, faces a maximum possible sentence of up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$250,000.

In New York State, if a water operator pleads or is found guilty of criminal or civil charges related to the water treatment plant and/or distribution system, this is grounds for revoking that operator's certification.

Falsification of information could also have serious implications to public health. Many of you may remember the Walkerton, Ontario case. The operators in the Walkerton case failed to take the appropriate samples and subsequently falsified official government records. The operators' failure to take the appropriate samples and record accurate information was a contributing factor to 2,300 people in the community becoming ill and 7 individuals losing their lives.

In summary, operators are being held accountable for their actions and they should know the importance of providing accurate information. Operators have a responsibility for protecting public health and the failure to take the appropriate samples and record accurate information can jeopardize the health of any one of us. 💧