

LEARNING EVERY DAY

By Dave Stenzel



Obtaining a Wastewater certification in New York State is a long and arduous process. First, there is on the job training for up to 3 years (depending on grade of certification required) to satisfy the state's requirements. During that time requirement, a trainee may attend the State mandated classes. The courses required for certification are based upon the grade of the plant. After all time and training requirements are met, a trainee must then pass an ABC Examination. Preparing for and taking this exam can be a very stressful time for a trainee due to the historical pass/fail rate. Less than 50% of all first-time takers will pass the test. It is my desire to help any trainee with assistance which includes training materials, practice tests, classroom training and on-site discussions in the hopes of increasing the percentage of first-time takers passing the exam.

Everyone training to become an operation specialist has a different style and capability of learning. Some people are natural learners in a classroom setting while others are more apt to learn from hands on experience. Even though operation specialist trainees may learn differently, the same outcome is desired by all, obtaining a New York State Wastewater Certification.

After initial certification is obtained, the recertification process begins instantly. An operation specialist is required to obtain a certain number of training hours every five years. The number of hours is dependent on the grade of certification. Part of my responsibilities with New York Rural Water Association (NYRWA) is to also plan and implement recertification training courses around the state. As an operation specialist myself, I understand the challenges faced in obtaining hours to recertify. Traveling distance, course topic and time available are some of the factors involved in the decision whether to attend classroom training. It is one of my personal goals at NYRWA to have trainings that are directly relevant to an operation specialists need and for topics they desire. The NYRWA Annual Technical Training Workshop is also a great place to get training hours and I encourage everyone to attend.

In the wastewater industry, the operation specialists that will be able to retire in the short term severely outweigh the interest there is in starting a wastewater career. Not too many people see the wastewater industry as a glamorous career. The stringent requirements to become certified and maintain that certification, can also be a deterrent to potential new operation specialist trainees. Promoting the industry and trying to help trainees get certified is a goal that we at NYRWA and almost all NYS operation specialists share. In the last couple years, NYRWA has started an Apprenticeship Program to try and educate new trainees. It is a 24-month program which has had a positive effect in the industry. New York has achieved one of the highest enrollments, program retention and graduation rates of any Rural Water Apprenticeship Program in the United States.

In my position with New York Rural Water Association as a Wastewater Technician/Trainer, I try to assist Sewer Departments with any operational issues they are facing. I also educate operation specialists and trainees of any new programs and regulations along with informing them of any upcoming trainings.

In the past year I have facilitated many trainings and try to make them as informative and as topic relevant as I can. Sitting all day listening to a speaker can make for a long day. Getting operation specialists involved whether with hands on materials or Q&A for the speaker makes the learning process in the classroom much more interesting and educational.



It is my opinion that Wastewater Operation Specialists in NYS are some of the most dedicated individuals you will ever find. The job they perform is not one of glory or public recognition but is by far one of the most important careers in the workforce. They not only have a responsibility to protect the environment, but also what they do can directly affect public health. The general public has no idea what an operation specialist does or the... >>>



challenges they face on a daily basis. The hours they work are not always "normal" as they are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week 365 days a year. The regulations they are required to follow along with the new ones they see on a regular basis can make for a very stressful career. That being said, it is still a career that has a great feeling of accomplishment.

In my time as an operation specialist and as a superintendent, I strived to make my community aware of the job that all of us operation specialists at our facility performed. We would welcome any community member to visit the facility to get a basic understanding of the daily challenges we faced. I also asked any existing and new Town Board Members to do the same. Also, we encouraged our local schools and colleges to take tours of our facility in the hopes to spark even just one student into becoming an operation specialist. I encourage all the superintendents and operation specialists I talk to, to do the same.

Training at a wastewater facility is never ending. You have required training to get certified, re-certified and you have on the job

training and information that will increase your knowledge every day no matter how many years you are there. The old saying "you will learn something new every day of your life" is one I have always believed in and will always promote.

In my many years of operating and supervising a wastewater facility, I have taken countless training classes and have met hundreds of wastewater operation specialists. The learning at classes was never limited to the course content. On many occasions, information was either obtained from other operation specialists or shared with them. No two wastewater plants are run the same, as the influent to each facility has a different characteristic so when operation specialists get together, it is a great time to share stories, ideas and successful remedies of operational issues.

Sometimes all of the information learned at a training course doesn't come from course topic, but from the "coffee break" discussion with other operation specialists you may already know or have just met. It has been my experience that this is a valuable asset in the process of getting certified or just helping another facility with an issue.

If anyone has a suggestion for course topics for training, feel free to email, or call me. It is my desire to help any and all operation specialists and trainees get the knowledge they want and need to succeed in the world of wastewater. Reach out: 518-828-3155 ext. 250. 💧💧💧

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