



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Environmental Protection**

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DRINKING WATER PROGRAM

Resources for New Drinking Water Operators

Are you or someone you know interested in learning more about drinking water operations and navigating the examination and licensing process to become a drinking water operator? Read this document for some guidance to use and share with individuals looking to get into the industry.

What is a Drinking Water Operator?

Drinking Water Operators are individuals who provide onsite management, operations, or maintenance services to Public Water Systems (PWS). Drinking Water Operators make sure that all PWS meet the requirements of federal and state drinking water rules. Operators play a critical role in protecting public health, as they are the first line of defense when providing safe drinking water.

Drinking Water Operators run the equipment and control the processes that create safe drinking water. They maintain and repair pipes, valves, pumps, controls, generators, and other equipment used to produce drinking water. They sample and test water at various points in the treatment and distribution process to ensure the treatment processes are working correctly to maintain safe drinking water. Drinking Water Operators protect the security of their community's water supply, treatment, and distribution system before, during, and after both natural and human-caused emergencies.

Is a career in Drinking Water Operations right for YOU?

A career in Drinking Water Operations is a very meaningful career choice. Drinking Water Operators make a huge, positive difference in the health and safety of their communities by providing safe drinking water. You may be interested in a career in Drinking Water Operations if you are drawn to any of the following considerations.

- **Hands-on, physical work.** A career in drinking water operations is a good fit for individuals who want an active, physical job. Drinking water operators spend their days on their feet, moving throughout the treatment and distribution system to ensure that all equipment and processes are in working order. Operators may climb ladders, lift heavy objects, or conduct on-foot inspections of facilities.
- **Problem solving and communication skills.** Drinking water operators must think on their feet while troubleshooting issues that arise in their water systems.

Operators must communicate clearly and effectively with their managers, town officials, regulators, and more.

- **Attention to detail.** Drinking water operators need good observation skills and an ability to detect hazards, read blueprints, work with complex equipment, and follow procedures. Operators must be able to multi-task with precision in order to adequately manage all aspects of their water system.
- **Career stability and progression.** Water is a necessary part of our lives, so there will always be jobs in the drinking water industry. Many water systems offer excellent benefits and opportunities for career advancement, especially as experienced drinking water operators begin to retire.

Massachusetts Drinking Water Operator Licensing – The Basics

In Massachusetts, there are several types of drinking water operator licenses that an individual can obtain. The type of license depends on the Public Water System where the individual works and the level of education and experience that the individual has. Operators are allowed to hold multiple licenses, which stay active as long as they are properly renewed each renewal period.

Firstly, there are two license types: **treatment** (T) and **distribution** (D). The license grade for each type can range from Grade 1 to Grade 4 depending on the individual's level of education and experience. Grade 1 is the lowest license grade, while Grade 4 is the highest. There is also a distribution license called a **Very Small System (VSS)** license for operators working in a VSS.

Secondly, there are two license statuses: **full** and **operator-in-training** (OIT). Individuals can obtain a full license if they meet all education, experience, and training requirements for a particular license. Individuals obtain an OIT license if they are missing some of the education, experience, or training requirements for a particular license. The education and experience requirements necessary for full license status can be viewed at the webpage [Education & Experience Requirements for Full Operator Certification](#).

If you are a new drinking water operator, it may benefit you to obtain the lowest grade license(s) (i.e. a Grade 1 Distribution License (D1), a Grade 1 Treatment License (T1), and/or a VSS License). The license(s) you need to obtain will depend on the Public Water System where you work and the requirements of your employer.

The Examination and Licensing Process

Once you know which license you want to obtain, you must take and pass an examination for that license grade. There are examination options for every license grade and type. Examinations are taken on a computer at a PSI testing center. You can register for examination at the [PSI examination scheduling website](#).

It is important to note that in Massachusetts, examinations must be taken sequentially (i.e. starting at Grade 1 and working upwards to Grades 2, 3, and 4, as needed). So, if you need to obtain a Grade 2 license, you must pass the Grade 1 exam first.

Additionally, in Massachusetts, there is a pre-requisite training requirement prior to taking Grade 2 and higher examinations. The Drinking Water Operator Licensing Board's website includes a list of [approved education courses to sit for examination](#). There is no pre-requisite training requirement to take the Grade 1 or VSS examinations; however, if you are new to drinking water operations, it may benefit you to take a training course to prepare for the examinations.

Once you pass your examination, you can [apply for a Drinking Water Operator license](#) online on the Drinking Water Operator Licensing Board's website. License applications must be submitted within 12 months of receiving your passing examination score. One thing to note is that while examinations must be taken sequentially (as mentioned above), you do not have to obtain licenses sequentially. As long as you pass the required examination(s), you can apply for your desired license.

Completely New to Drinking Water Operations? Start with an Introductory Training Course!

If you are completely new to the drinking water operations field, you may benefit from an Introductory Training Course. These training courses are geared towards individuals who have no background in drinking water operations. These training courses will prepare you for taking the VSS, D1, and T1 examinations. There are several training providers that provide these courses with varying costs and delivery (e.g. virtual, in-person, and hybrid).

Additionally, the Drinking Water Operator Licensing Board's Operator Exam FAQ lists [training manuals to help prepare for exams](#).

Already in the Drinking Water industry but new to Massachusetts? Licensure via Reciprocity is an option!

Are you a drinking water operator moving to Massachusetts? You may be eligible for drinking water operator licensure via reciprocity. Reciprocity may be granted if you meet the following standards:

1. You must hold an active license in good standing of the same grade in another state as the license you are seeking in Massachusetts.
2. The state in which your license is held must use standardized exams from Water Professionals International (WPI) (formerly Association of Boards of Certification (ABC)), and you must be able to verify that you have passed the exam for the grade license you hold.

3. You must meet all education and experience requirements for the grade of license being applied for in Massachusetts. This includes the requirements for sequential examination and pre-requisite training courses.

For more information about reciprocity, please contact the Drinking Water Licensing Board at drinkingwaterboard@mass.gov.

Additional Resources

Use the following links to learn more about drinking water operations, find trainings, and more. Additionally, you can contact the Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov for any questions or additional information.

- [MassDEP Water Supplier Operations homepage](#)
- [MassDEP Public Water System Operations](#)
- [MassDEP Public Water System Capacity Development](#)
- [MassDEP Technical Assistance](#)
- [MassDEP Drinking Water Training and Training Calendar](#)
- [Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities](#)
- [236 CMR 4.00 – Certification of Operators of Public Water Systems](#)
- [New England Water Works Association](#)
- [Massachusetts Water Works Association](#)
- [Massachusetts Rural Water Association](#)
- [WaterOperator.Org](#)