

MANUAL FOR APPROVING CONTINUING EDUCATION  
COURSES FOR OPERATOR LICENSING

For the

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Operator Certification Program

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**PAGE**

**CHAPTER ONE**

Purpose and Definitions.....2

**CHAPTER TWO**

General Requirements.....4

Schedule and Attendance Records.....4

Certification of Students.....5

Textbooks.....5

Instructors.....6

Advertising.....6

Disapproval of Courses or Seminars.....7

Penalties.....7

Licensee Compliance.....7

**CHAPTER THREE**

Roles of the Providers .....8

Qualifications .....8

Certification  
Submittals.....8

Sponsor Approval.....8

Roles of the  
Sponsor.....8

**CHAPTER FOUR**

Requirements for Course  
Approval.....9

Approved  
Content.....10

Disapproved  
Content.....10

Assignments of  
CEU's.....10

Audits.....11

## CHAPTER ONE Purpose and Definitions

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of continuing education for personnel licensed to operate drinking water and domestic wastewater treatment facilities is to encourage the dissemination of information on current or new technology and improve skills in plant management and operations. The purpose of this document is to establish standards and approval criteria for continuing education courses, the sponsors of the courses, and the entities approving the courses. These continuing education courses will be required to renew licenses for operators of public water systems and domestic wastewater treatment systems.

### 1.2 Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions shall apply.

- (1) **"Administrative record"** means any document relating to course approval, course offerings, attendance, course completions or credits, and any other records required to be kept by the Operator Certification Rule.
- (2) **"Assessment"** means the process for determining individual learning achievement.
- (3) **"Approved" or "qualified,"** with regard to a Provider, Sponsor, course, school, or instructor, means that the Department or Provider has determined that the applicant has met the criteria set forth in this document for approval and qualification.
- (4) **"Agenda"** means the schedule of how a continuing education course is to be presented including time allotment to subject matter and any meals and break times.
- (5) **"Audit"** means Department activity to monitor the offering of courses or examinations, including visits to classrooms, test sites, and administrative offices where documentation of individual attendance, completion records, and documentation of instructor credentials is maintained. Audit also means re-evaluating approved classroom course outlines and self-study programs based on current guidelines.
- (6) **"Course"** shall mean any class or seminar which has been approved by the Department for the purpose of complying with continuing education requirements.
- (7) **"Credit unit" or "CEU"** means ten hours of contact time. This time may be in the form of classroom time or a seminar. Self-study programs will be evaluated based upon an equivalent classroom time.
- (8) **"Department"** means the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.
- (9) **"Disciplinary action"** means administrative action that has been taken against an individual or entity as a licensee or approved course sponsor, instructor, or school official for which probation, suspension, or revocation of any license (issued by this or any other state, country, or territory) or approved status has occurred or for which a fine has been entered for a wrong doing.
- (10) **"Dual Licensed"** means holding both a drinking water and wastewater license at the same time.
- (11) **"Entity"** means a person, firm, institution, partnership, company, corporation, or association offering, sponsoring, or providing courses approved by the Department in eligible continuing education subjects.
- (12) **"Evaluation"** means a process of measuring success of courses or programs or the elements of courses and programs such as instruction, learning materials, and administration.
- (13) **"Formal program of learning"** means structured class or study material with an instructor and detailed outline, and not merely a discussion group without a leader or a general review outline for an examination.
- (14) **"Hour"** means sixty minutes of class or seminar time, of which at least fifty minutes *must* be instruction, with a maximum of ten minutes of break per hour, all of which must be accounted for on the agenda or syllabus. For self-study courses, "hour" means sixty minutes of time including reading, studying and completing assignments or projects.

- (15) **"Incomplete CEU Course Approval"** means that an application for CEU Course Approval does not contain all correct information to be placed thereon, or on any required accompanying documentation, as required by the application or form or by any statute or rule of the Department. An application or form which contains errors, omissions, or which requires additional or clarifying information is an incomplete application or form.
- (16) **"Instructor"** means a person who has been approved by the Department or Provider and who teaches or otherwise instructs an approved continuing education classroom course or program.
- (17) **"Provider"** must be a non-profit organization or educational institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Types of educational institutions are accredited universities, community colleges, and vocational technical centers. Provider must be approved by the Department to offer courses. All Providers must be headquartered in the State of Florida.
- (18) **"Recognized association,"** as used when describing an association in this manual, means an organization of individual licensees, companies, or business entities involved in the drinking water or wastewater industry that is established in Florida or on a national level, whether incorporated or not, which has officers and a board of directors elected by the membership; by-laws which establish requirements for membership; regular meeting schedules and agendas; a list of enrolled members from the most recent 12 months; and has been established for at least one year.
- (19) **"Self-study Program"** means study material in text, video, cassette, or computer based which is designed for individual study by a licensee, which has been approved by the Department or Provider.
- (20) **"Seminar"** means a course designed to be presented using lecture, video, satellite, or other audio-visual presentation material by individuals with special expertise, which has an approved speaker or instructor present in the classroom during the presentation. A seminar may be presented any number of times within 12 months from the date the seminar is approved by the Department. A seminar is not an on-going class, but a different program from year to year. Seminar courses are identified as conventions, conferences, or annual meetings.
- (21) **"Speaker" or "Lecturer"** means a person who has special expertise, who speaks at an approved seminar, and whose resume is furnished by the sponsor with the course application.
- (22) **"Sponsor"** means any entity that does not qualify to be a "Provider" but has expertise in drinking water or domestic wastewater treatment and has been approved by a Provider to present a course or seminar.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **General Information**

#### **2.1 General Requirements**

License renewal in Florida is required every two years with each period beginning on May 1<sup>st</sup>, of odd numbered years. The required number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) must be earned during the renewal period to renew a license without additional fees. CEUs can be earned only by successfully completing approved classroom courses, seminars, or self-study courses. To present classroom courses, seminars, or self-study courses for CEUs in the State of Florida, the presenter must be a Provider that has been approved by the Department or have a classroom course, seminar, or self-study course approved by a Provider. General requirements for Providers are:

- (a) Entities that qualify as Providers shall apply to the Department according to procedures outlined in Chapter 3.0 and document qualifications.
- (b) The Provider is responsible for the actions of its school officials, instructors, and speakers, etc.
- (c) Providers shall notify the Department in writing within 30 days after a change in their telephone number, mailing address, or administrative office address.
- (d) Providers shall ensure that all approved CEUs meet the minimum criteria in Chapter 4.

The Department shall be notified of all courses and seminars approved by each Provider.

General requirements for sponsors are:

- (a) The sponsors shall maintain the records for 4 years from the date of completion for each individual completing a course.
- (b) Before presenting a course or seminar for CEU credit in the State, the sponsor is responsible to have all courses and seminars approved by a Provider according to the requirements outlined in Chapter 4.1.
- (c) The sponsor is responsible for the actions of their school officials, instructors, and speakers, etc.
- (d) Sponsors shall notify the Provider in writing within 30 days after a change in their telephone number, mailing address, or administrative office address.

#### **2.2 Schedule and Attendance Records**

The sponsor of each class or seminar shall furnish a completed Schedule of Classes for each class or seminar offering for each location. This Schedule of Classes shall be received by the Department or Provider 30 days prior to the first day of the class or seminar, and must be approved by the Department or Provider prior to the beginning of the class or seminar offering. The Department or Provider will assign a unique Course Code Number to each Course to identify each specific class or seminar. This number must be entered on the roster of students successfully completing the class or seminar. Classes and seminars must be in session on scheduled dates during specified hours and held in an area readily accessible for audit by an authorized Department employee.

Sponsors may submit Schedules of Classes for approved courses on an annual or biennial basis and receive acknowledgment of approval by the Department or Provider before the beginning of the class. A sponsor cannot award credit for a class or seminar prior to the approval of the course application by the Department or Provider.

Sponsors with member chapters may allow those chapters to hold classes under the course approval number for the sponsor. The chapter must communicate with the approved sponsor to identify current approved course names and file reference numbers. Only approved classroom courses are eligible. An authorized chapter representative must sign the roster. The approved sponsor's name must appear on the forms. Administrative records are the responsibility of the approved sponsor. However, the records may be maintained by each chapter if available for spontaneous administrative audits by the Department.

Sponsors shall maintain accurate attendance records of all approved courses and seminars. Records must be maintained by the sponsor and must be available to the Department for a period of 4 years after each completion

of an offering. Attendance records should not be submitted to the Department unless they are requested of the sponsor by the Department.

### **2.3 Certification of Students**

A Certificate of Completion shall be issued to each person completing a continuing education course. The sponsor shall send a complete roster of all students who successfully completed a classroom course, seminar, or self-study course so that the roster is received by the Provider no more than 30 days after the certificate was issued.

Classroom courses must be attended or completed in their entirety for a licensee to receive credit. Sponsors shall not issue certificates of completion to students who do not attend or complete the entire continuing education course. At the discretion of the sponsor, students may miss a class and attend a makeup class to complete the attendance requirement upon a showing of good cause. "Good cause" means an incident or occurrence which is beyond the control of the applicant and which prevents compliance. Examples of good cause are: Disabling accident, illness, call to military duty, or declared state or national emergency. The sponsor may hold makeup sessions to accommodate any student.

Seminars will be evaluated for the total number of hours of credit possible at the event. Sponsors may issue certificates of completion to students who do not attend the entire seminar if the seminar is made up of individual workshops or sessions where the subject presentation is completed in each workshop such as conventions and annual meetings. Attendees may receive less credit than the total possible by attending less than the total number of sessions.

Licensees must maintain completion certificates for all courses completed for 4 years from the completion dates. Failure to maintain these records for 4 years shall result in the Department or Provider relying solely on the submitted documents from course sponsors and Department records for compliance verification. Certificates should be issued as soon as attendance records can be verified and must be issued within 30 days after the completion date of the class or seminar. For CEUs earned in Florida, licensees are not required to submit copies of certificates to the Department unless requested by the Department. The Provider will be responsible for submitting this information.

Credit will be allowed for the authors of approved course material on the same basis as the number of hours for which the course is approved. A combination of authors can split the credit as determined by the school official. The total hours of credit received by all authors can never exceed the total hours for which the course is approved. To receive credit, a request must be filed with the original course application. Credit can be received only once for each separately approved course for which a unique course code number is assigned. The course material must consist of current editions that are no more than five years old. The completion date for purposes of author credit will be the published date of the text.

Credit must be earned in the type of treatment for which the operator is licensed. Credit hours in courses that are generic in nature will not be split between the substantive categories related to the applicable particular classes of licensure. The credit must be used for drinking water or wastewater but not used for both. As used in this subsection, the term "generic" means credit hours which are not classified as drinking water or wastewater treatment operation and which may be used for credit in either category. An example of a generic course would be a course on pumps. For operators that are dual licensed, the requirements of rule 62-602.710(4) (d) shall apply.

Neither students nor instructors may earn continuing education credit for attending or instructing at any subsequent offering of the same continuing education course for two years after attending or teaching the course.

### **2.4 Textbooks**

Textbooks are not required for class and seminar courses. Students are to be provided with an agenda containing, at a minimum, the course title; unique course code number; times and dates of the course offering; the name, address, and telephone number of the sponsor; and, a detailed outline of the subject matter to be covered for classroom courses or workshop summaries for seminars in addition to appropriate handouts. Any printed material dispersed to the students must be of a readable quality. Any textbook must contain accurate and current information relating to the subject being taught. Textbooks or other detailed study material such as

computer software or videos must be submitted for self-study course or seminar approval if the Department or Provider determines that the outline alone does not reasonably provide clear and sufficient information to allow the Department or Provider to determine whether approval shall be granted. Each self-study course must be sold with the approved textbook.

## **2.5 Instructors**

Instruction in continuing education courses shall be provided by instructors who possess at least 2 of the following qualifications:

1. A minimum of 3 years working experience in water and/or wastewater treatment.
2. Two teaching experiences in water and/or wastewater treatment certified by the school official.
3. A professional designation from a recognized industry association.
4. A degree from an accredited school in water and/or wastewater treatment.
5. Special expertise in water or wastewater treatment, or a documented history of research or study in the area.

Certification of the instructor's experience or education and a resume shall be furnished by the sponsor or the instructor, received by the Department or Provider and approved prior to the beginning of the course. Individuals may submit a certification of instructor's experience independent of any school with only the applying instructor's signature. The Department is authorized to initiate administrative action for failure to have only approved instructors teach at an approved continuing education course. Approved instructors for approved classroom courses must display a legal photo I.D. to any Department auditor who conducts an official audit during their instruction time.

The Department shall have the right to review existing records of approved instructors and disapprove and remove any instructor found to have had any disciplinary action taken against any drinking water or domestic wastewater license issued by this or any other state, country, or territory, at any time before or after being approved as instructor. Sponsors are responsible for verifying eligibility of instructors before submitting for approval. If an instructor has been denied approval by the Department to instruct continuing education courses, a six-month waiting period must elapse before a new certification request may be submitted.

Instructors will have the authority and responsibility to deny credit to anyone who disrupts the class or is inattentive. Based on the course sponsor's policies, refunds may be given. It will be a violation of the provisions of this document for an instructor or school official to knowingly allow during the class the activities of sleeping, reading of books, newspapers, or other non-course materials, use of a cellular phone, or to allow absence from class other than authorized breaks.

## **2.6 Advertising**

Courses shall not be advertised in any manner as an approved continuing education course unless course approval has been granted, in writing, by the Department or Provider. The wording "approval pending" or similar language is not authorized to be used for any course. Advertising must be truthful, clear, and not deceptive or misleading.

Continuing education advertising relating to approved continuing education courses shall contain the sponsor name, the name of the Provider granting approval and if it is approved for drinking water and/or wastewater CEU credit. In addition, it must show the Provider or Department unique course number for each course. The statement must be prominently displayed on the cover of any pamphlet, advertisement, or circular. The number of hours for which a course has been approved shall be prominently displayed on continuing education advertisements or circulars and shall differentiate approved continuing education credit hours from noncredit hours.

If the course is longer than the number of hours of credit to be given, it must be clear that additional credit is not earned for the entire course. Advertising of approved continuing education courses must be clearly distinguishable from the advertisement of all other courses and services which have not been approved to meet continuing education requirements. Advertising of several courses together to represent a single offering must identify each course separately with the approved course names.

## **2.7 Disapproval of Courses or Seminars**

Any one of the following criteria shall constitute grounds for the Provider or the Department to disapprove an Application for CEU Approval:

1. Disciplinary action has been taken by the Operator Certification Program against the school instructor or speaker by the Department.
2. The application is incomplete.
3. The person, sponsor, school, instructor, speaker or course associated therewith has not otherwise met the qualifications specified in this document.

The disapproval of a course by a Provider may be appealed to the Department to review the grounds for disapproval.

## **2.8 Penalties**

The Providers or the Department shall impose one of the following penalties on a sponsor for violations by sponsors, school officials, or instructors:

1. Withdraw approval of courses submitted by such sponsor for a period determined by the Department.
2. Suspend or revoke the authority to instruct or deny the approval of an instructor, speaker, and lecturer.

## **2.9 Licensee Compliance; Penalties for Non-Compliance**

A licensee shall be required to meet continuing education requirements by the end of each license renewal cycle. Licensees not meeting these requirements by the end of the renewal period shall not be issued a new license. A license shall not be issued until the required numbers of CEUs are earned and all required fees are paid. CEUs earned to meet the requirements of the previous renewal period shall not be valid for the current renewal period. The licensee is responsible for maintaining a file of certificates from successfully completed courses, which may be used to update Department records if necessary.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Providers and Sponsors**

#### **3.1 Roles of the Provider**

A Provider is an entity approved by the Department. Once approved, a Provider may present courses, seminars, or self- study courses for CEU credit, and approve courses submitted by sponsors. Their role is to ensure that the program planning content, organization and implementation comply with the criteria specified below. Providers must submit their qualifications to the Department and obtain Department approval before presenting courses, seminars or self- study courses for CEU credit or approving any course or seminar application for CEU credit. A request for proposal for Providers will be solicited as needed or biannually by the Department. Providers will be approved based on the proposals submitted during this solicitation.

#### **3.2 Qualifications**

Providers must provide documentation that the contract manager meets the following minimum qualification:

1. A minimum of 3 years working experience in water and/or wastewater treatment in Florida.
2. Demonstrate experience in presenting coursework, seminars, and/or self study courses for 3 years.
3. Demonstrate special expertise in water or wastewater treatment and a documented history of research or study in the area.

#### **3.3 Certification Submittals**

Completion records for all classroom courses, seminars, and self-study courses are due to the Provider or the Department no more than 30 days after the certificate is issued. All completion records must be submitted on 3.5" diskettes and must include the operator's social security number, name, license type, license number, address, course or seminar number, completion date, and number of CEUs earned. Completion records shall be transmitted from the Provider to the Department in an electronic format approved by the Department.

#### **3.4 Sponsor Approval**

An entity that sponsors a continuing education course must be approved by the Department or a Provider and be operated by, or for, a recognized association, a non-profit educational institute, a public water or wastewater system with established training departments, an independent program of instruction, or an institution of higher learning. A sponsor must meet the minimum requirements in Chapter 4 of this manual to obtain approval for CEU credit for a course or seminar.

#### **3.5 Roles of the Sponsor**

A Sponsor is an entity that has submitted a course or seminar to a Provider for approval. Once a course or seminar is approved, the sponsor may present the course or seminar for CEU credit. Their role is to ensure that the program planning, content, organization and implementation comply with the criteria specified below. Sponsors must submit their qualifications to the Provider and obtain approval before presenting courses, seminars or self- study courses for CEU credit

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Course Approval**

#### **4.1 Requirements for Course Approval**

The Department or Provider will approve a course as an acceptable continuing education program if it:

- (a) Is a "formal program of learning" which contributes directly to the professional competence of a licensee;
- (b) Is not defined under this manual as a "not approved" course;
- (c) Has significant intellectual or practical content to enhance and improve the knowledge of the participants or enhance career potential;
- (d) Uses the most recent forms, editions, and laws;
- (e) Includes "evaluation" and "assessment" methods;
- (f) Includes an indication of the level of ability required to benefit from the course on the basis of basic, intermediate, or advanced levels;
- (g) Includes a bibliography of reference sources, if any;
- (h) Includes a list and sample of supplemental teaching aids, if any; and
- (i) Meets all other criteria set forth in this document.

Note: Courses offered across two renewal periods must split the CEUs earned between the two periods. For example a week long course that is 5 hours per day from April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup> will have 1 CEU credited in the earlier renewal period and 1.5 CEUs credited in the later renewal period.

Requests for approval of courses shall include the curriculum to be studied, texts, sample examinations (when applicable), and a copy of the printed instructions to staff or school officials for distribution of course material and examinations. Examinations must be referenced back to the text. If requested by the Department, the school official or representative must be able to identify the reference in the text for a particular question.

Self-study courses shall be completed by the licensee by achieving a grade of 70% or more on an examination approved by the Department or Provider. Self-study entities have the same responsibilities for record keeping as any other sponsor. The sponsor shall maintain examination records for a period of 4 years. The sponsor must diligently examine the course completion records to maintain the integrity of the grades reported. On or before each anniversary date of course approval, the sponsor shall submit to the Department a substantially revised examination for each course unless examinations are updated with each course sold.

The detail required for seminars is less than for classes. The approval package must include:

- (a) The topics to be presented and the speakers for each topic with clearly designated times.
- (b) A brief written description of the material to be presented and the objective of each presentation.
- (c) The date(s) and location of the seminar.

Each individual speaker must be approved by the Department or Provider before credit may be given for a session. Approved speakers shall be knowledgeable in the subject matter being presented. The subject matter shall be designed to improve the professional skills of the participants, and to upgrade the standard of all licensees to better serve the public.

The sponsor shall supply a resume of the speaker to the Department with the Application for CEU Course Approval. The resume must include sufficient information regarding the proposed speaker to allow the Department to make an informed decision regarding the qualifications of the speaker. The Application for CEU Course Approval also shall include an outline or descriptive summary of the speech, and any handouts.

Courses required to qualify for examinations are approved for CEUs, however, the CEUs earned will only apply to the type of license specified on the application for examination. The number of CEUs earned for these courses shall satisfy all CEU requirements for that license. For management courses required for Class A licenses, the credit may be applied to both licenses, if the student is dual licensed.

#### **4.2 Approved Content**

It is the responsibility of the Provider to ensure that the subject matter of each course is one of the following:

- (a) operation and control of a treatment plant,
- (b) treatment processes,
- (c) health and safety, associated with wastewater or drinking water systems.
- (d) employment and community right-to-know notification procedures,
- (e) toxic and hazardous materials handling procedures,
- (f) solids and residuals,
- (g) supervision and management,
- (h) basic chemistry and biology,
- (i) mathematics of the treatment process,
- (j) laboratory sampling procedures,
- (k) equipment maintenance and repair,
- (l) computer applications for water or wastewater treatment,
- (m) blue print reading,
- (n) government rules and procedures applicable to water or wastewater treatment,
- (o) back flow prevention/cross connection control,
- (p) new or alternative technologies associated with water or wastewater treatment,
- (q) distribution and collection systems.

### **4.3 Disapproved Content**

The following are NOT approved:

Courses in:

1. Mechanical office or business skills (including typing, speed reading, etc.),
2. The use of calculators or other machines or equipment,
3. The use of computer software or equipment except in computer applications for water or wastewater treatment processes.
4. Motivation
5. Courses which are primarily intended to impart knowledge of specific products of specific companies, if the use of the products relates to the sales promotion or marketing of one or more of the products discussed;

The following subjects shall be eligible for approval of credit; however, no more than 50% of the CEU requirements for a license may be utilized in these areas.

- (a) Courses in communication, time management, or stress management;
- (b) Courses relating to management, client relations or improving the operations of the licensee's business as they relate to customers.

If approval has been granted for the initial offering of a class or self-study examination of an approved course, approval for subsequent offerings shall be granted without requiring a new application for course approval within the 2 year renewal cycle for which the course received approval. Materials and speeches used in subsequent offerings of approved courses must be updated based on current information. Classroom courses, which have not been used for a period of 5 years, will be purged from the Provider's and the Department's database file. Future use of the courses requires a new application. "Use" means the activity of presenting the classroom course.

### **4.4 Assignment of CEUs**

For classroom courses, one CEU shall be assigned for each 10 hours of classroom time. One ten-minute break is allowed during each one-hour period. For self-study courses, CEUs shall be assigned by comparing the course work to an equivalent classroom course. The number of CEUs issued for a seminar will be determined based on a case by case review or the material included in the submittal. The Provider or the Department will review the materials, assign the program CEU value, and notify the responsible party in writing of class approval and the CEU value. CEUs shall be on an hour for hour basis. If each session is assigned CEUs independently, partial credit may be given for attending a portion of the seminar, at the discretion of the sponsor

### **4.5 Audits**

Self-audits shall be conducted by the Provider and submitted to the Department every two years. The Department shall audit Providers as deficiencies are noted. The Department and Provider reserve the right to audit courses and administrative records with or without notice to the sponsor. Audits will result in notice to the sponsor of deficiencies found and of corrective action required by the sponsor where warranted. The Department or Provider will reduce the number of approved credit hours for the course or disapprove the course entirely if the sponsor fails to correct the deficiencies.