



Water Operator Certification Training Program New Mexico Rural Water Association

Sponsored by the NMED Drinking Water Bureau

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Rules for Operator Certification Expense Reimbursement Program

Introduction

The New Mexico Rural Water Association (NMRWA) has partnered with the New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau (NMED DWB) to offer an exciting new program to help train and certify operators of small water systems. The ***Water Operator Certification Training Program*** offers free training sessions located throughout the state, in order to be as convenient as possible for operators and aspiring operators. Students meeting eligibility requirements will be reimbursed for expenses related to attending the training sessions, and you may even be reimbursed for the certification exam fee.

A primary goal of the program is to increase the number of systems with certified operators in New Mexico. Training will focus on the following water certification levels: Small System, Advanced Small System, Class 1 and Class 2. A variety of course topics will be taught by qualified instructors, who will provide course material free of charge to students. Mock exam sessions will be held in order to give students the test-taking skills they need to successfully pass the certification exams.

This program is funded through a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Like any program using federal monies, it is very important to understand and follow the rules in order to receive operator certification credit and your reimbursement check. Our goal is to make these rules as simple and as easy to understand as possible. The schedule of classes and all program forms and information is available online at: www.nmrwa.org/erg.php.

Eligibility

Water system operators or persons seeking their certification may be reimbursed for eligible expenses by NMRWA. Students *must* be attending the classes on behalf of a water system serving less than 3,301 persons. Tribal water system representatives are eligible. This program is specifically targeted towards *small system* water operators – this means systems serving less than 3,301 persons, according to the USEPA definition. Only small system representatives of community water systems (CWS) and non-transient, non-community water systems (NTNCWS) are eligible for expense reimbursement. A *community water system* supplies drinking water to at least 15 connections or 25 or more of the same people year-round in their residences. A *non-transient, non-community water system* supplies water to 25 or more of the same people at least six months per year in places other than their residences. If you are unsure if your water system

meets these criteria, ask a NMRWA staff member or consult the list of eligible water systems on our website.

Only two persons per eligible water system may receive reimbursement for expenses. The first two people registering for a training session under this program will be recorded as the official water system representatives. You must sign a certification statement on the Expense Reimbursement Form identifying yourself as an authorized representative of an eligible small water system. If one or both of the authorized representatives of the system become unable to participate in the program due to valid reasons, new representatives may be assigned using a form available from NMRWA. This form must be signed by the water system board president and secretary, or persons holding equivalent positions.

Anyone may attend the training sessions and receive operator certification credit, depending on space limitations. If the number of students registering for a class exceeds the limit, priority will be given to small water system authorized representatives.

Expense Reimbursement

Authorized representatives of small water systems may be reimbursed for mileage to and from the training session only. Only one person per vehicle may claim mileage expenses - if you carpool to the training, only one of you can be reimbursed! Mileage reimbursement is currently set at \$0.32 per mile. Identify the nearest town to your home on the reimbursement form. Mileage will be determined using map miles from your house to the training session. If you live outside the limits of the nearest town, list the additional miles *one way* from your home to the nearest town to your home. You will be reimbursed for this amount of miles only, regardless of the amount of driving you do while attending the training session or if you decide to start or end your travel at a different location than your home.

Unpaid volunteer operators or system representatives may also receive reimbursement for actual meal and lodging expenses, up to limits set by the State. Unpaid volunteers are defined as system representatives who receive no compensation for labor performed at an eligible water system. If the water system reimburses you for expenses such as gas, this does not count as compensation for labor.

For most areas, lodging expenses may not exceed \$85 per night (including all taxes and fees), and meal expenses may not exceed \$30 per day. Your instructor will tell you if the maximum daily rate for lodging expenses is higher for a special area. Lodging and meal expenses will be reimbursed based on actual costs – so you *must* provide receipts showing the amount you spent on meals and lodging! **Receipts must be itemized.** No exceptions or allowances will be made for incomplete or incorrect paperwork. Keep a copy of all receipts and Expense Reimbursement Forms for your records. NMRWA staff will make every effort to assist you in completing the paperwork correctly. It is your responsibility to read and follow the rules.

We will also be providing reimbursement for certification exam fees for all eligible paid *and* unpaid volunteer system representatives. You may receive reimbursement for exam fees up to three times from this program.

Attendance

You must be present for the entire training session in order to qualify for expense reimbursement. Some sessions are multi-day sessions. You must be present for all portions of the class, or you will not be eligible for reimbursement of expenses. You will still receive operator certification credits for the hours you are in attendance, if you cannot stay for the entire training session. You will be given a ten minute grace period to return to the classroom from all breaks and lunch. We are required to enforce this provision of the program, so be sure you make it back on time!

Behavior

This program is intended to increase the number and professionalism of certified water operators in New Mexico. Your cooperation with NMRWA staff instructions is appreciated. Unprofessional or disruptive behavior cannot be tolerated. You may be asked to leave the training session if your behavior is disruptive to other students. Note that you will not be eligible for expenses reimbursement if you are asked to leave the training session.

You will be required to sign a certification statement on the Expense Reimbursement Form stating that all information on the form is true and correct to the best of your knowledge. NMRWA staff may verify the information that you provide to ensure accuracy. Any person who knowingly provides false information on the Expense Reimbursement Form will be asked to return any reimbursement money, and will be disqualified from participating in the Operator Certification Expense Reimbursement Program in the future.

Issuance of Reimbursement Checks

All paperwork will be submitted to NMRWA, and we will request reimbursement from NMED at the end of each month. Upon approving our invoice, NMED will issue us a check. We are not allowed to reimburse anyone before receiving payment from NMED. This process may take up to three months. All checks will be issued by NMRWA to the address you give us on the reimbursement form. Ensure that the mailing address that you provide on the Expense Reimbursement Form is accurate. NMRWA is not responsible for lost checks due to incorrect mailing information provided by students.

Training Sessions

Note that only classes held under the *Water Operator Certification Training Program* are eligible for expense reimbursement. NMRWA will continue to offer training sessions under other programs, which will not qualify you for reimbursement. Eligible classes will be clearly marked on our training schedule. Check our website for information on class times and locations: www.nmrwa.org/erg.php. You may also pre-register for training sessions online.

A brief description of the training sessions offered under the *Water Operator Certification Training Program* follows:

Operator Certification Fundamentals – this course will be offered once a month and will teach participants the skills and knowledge that they need to successfully pass the operator certification exam. Instructors will provide study materials and sample problems, and will work with individual students if necessary to increase proficiency. The length of the course will be 2.5 days.

Mock Exam Sessions – training sessions will be held monthly to familiarize students with the “Need to Know” exam criteria and to develop test-taking skills. This .5 day session may be held at the end of the Operator Certification Fundamentals course.

Continuing Education for Operators – this one day course will also be offered monthly to operators seeking credits to renew their certifications. These training sessions will be similar to the sessions currently offered by NMRWA.

Laboratory Procedures – this one day course will be offered three times a year at locations around the state. Students will learn laboratory safety, correct testing procedures and laboratory protocols.

Disinfectants and Disinfection By-Products – this one day course will be offered every other month, and will assist operators in complying with disinfection requirements.

Water System Security – this one day course will be offered once a quarter. Students will learn how to use software to develop plans to protect their systems from accidental contamination, vandalism and terrorist acts.

For Assistance or More Information

Please contact the NMRWA office at 1-800-819-9893 with any questions. The schedule of classes and all program forms and information is available online at: www.nmrwa.org/erg.php. All NMRWA staff members will make every effort to assist you. Expense Reimbursement Forms should be mailed to: NMRWA, 3413 Carlisle Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110.

Program Funding Source

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