



Fact Sheet

Using DWSRF Set-Aside Funds for Operator Certification

WHAT IS THE DWSRF?

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) program was established by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) Amendments of 1996. The program authorizes grants to States to capitalize revolving loan funds. States use funds to provide loan assistance to eligible public water systems for infrastructure improvements needed to continue to ensure safe drinking water. The program also emphasizes the prevention of drinking water contamination by allowing States to reserve a portion of their grants to fund activities that encourage enhanced water system management and source water protection.

WHAT IS OPERATOR CERTIFICATION?

In order to ensure continued protection of public health, it is important that the operators of facilities providing drinking water to the public have adequate training. Proper operations and maintenance by qualified persons can also prevent premature depreciation of drinking water infrastructure. In order to further the SDWA objectives of protecting public health, the 1996 Amendments require that EPA establish minimum requirements for the certification and recertification of operators of community and nontransient non-community water systems. Final guidelines describing the minimum requirements that States must meet were released by EPA on February 5, 1999.

Under SDWA §1419, States have two years from the date of publication of the final operator certification guidelines to develop and begin implementing an operator certification program that meets the requirements of the guidelines. Beginning in fiscal year 2001, any State that has not done so will receive a 20 percent withholding of its DWSRF allotment.

Under SDWA §1452(g)(2), States may use up to 10 percent of their DWSRF allotment for State program management activities, which can include the development and implementation of operator certification programs.

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SET-ASIDE FUNDING?

States can fund a number of operator certification implementation activities under the 10 percent State program management [§1452(g)(2)] set-aside. Potential operator certification activities include, but are not limited to:

- C Conducting stakeholder board/advisory committee meetings to obtain public input on program elements.
- C Providing assistance to third parties to provide operator training.
- C Organizing and conducting training courses for individuals to become certified, achieve a higher level of certification, or renew an existing certification.
- C Developing, validating, processing, and grading certification exams.
- C Tracking and monitoring the status of certified operators.
- C Conducting enforcement activities (e.g., preparing administrative orders, revoking certificates, etc.).

HOW ARE STATES USING THIS SET-ASIDE?

- C **New Mexico** is using funds to supplement its existing operator certification program. In addition to funding staff positions, the State will use funds to develop a database to track public water supply compliance with State operator certification regulations. The State will fund a contract to provide classroom operator training held throughout the State over the next two years. Because the State recognizes that senior operators and others with specialized experience often provide the best opportunity for expanding operator instruction, it will issue a contract to develop curricular material and instructor's guides for Train the Trainer workshops to improve skills of volunteer peer instructors.

- C The SDWA Amendments expanded the universe of water systems that are required to have a certified operator to include small systems. **Maine** is using funds to contract with organizations such as the New England Water Works Association and Maine Rural Water Association to provide training to operators of small systems which often have limited resources and no prior experience with licensing. The State will also provide training to the governing boards of water systems about the need for compliance with regulations to facilitate informed policy decision-making for their systems.

- C In **North Carolina**, the NC Public Water Supply Section of the Division of Environmental Health works cooperatively with State affiliates of the Waterworks Operators Association, Rural Water Association, and American Waterworks Association to provide comprehensive training to operators of water systems. The State intends to fund a full-time registrar to administer, evaluate, and provide record-keeping for the operator training program. The State will also use funds to develop and mail an annual training calendar and periodic newsletters to publicize the training activities of all providers.

HOW CAN I OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION?

Information about the DWSRF and operator certification programs is available on the EPA Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW) homepage [www.epa.gov/safewater]. For questions concerning a specific State, a list of State or EPA Regional DWSRF coordinators can be found on OGWDW's webpage. You can also call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

