

DATE: 3/1/2011
TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Viola Bay Wild, Senior Fiscal Analyst
RE: Wastewater Operator Certification Fee Proposal

The following information details the Wastewater Operator Certification Fee increase proposal that is part of the Governor's Executive Recommended Budget for FY 2011-12.

Wastewater Operator Certification Program

Within the DEQ, the Environmental Resource Management Division (ERMD) has an Operator Training and Certification Unit that administers programs for the training and certification of the operators of municipal and industrial wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities. The program offers training on treatment process control and laboratory analysis and offers on-site technical assistance concerning the operation, maintenance, and laboratory analyses upon request as well. The goal of the program is to assure that there are adequate numbers of competent, well-trained, and certified drinking water and wastewater treatment facility operators in Michigan.

The program is funded by fees, federal grants and restricted funding. In 2009, the program sponsored or co-sponsored 55 formal training events which were attended by almost 5,000 facility operators, supervisors, managers, and local government representatives.

Program Funding

In past years, the program was funded through operator training fees, GF/GP and federal funding. However, in FY 2010, the GF/GP was eliminated and the Water Resources Division within DEQ provided temporary funding to help the program continue. This funding is no longer available in FY 2012.

According to the DEQ, in order to fund the program and continue to provide operator training, a new fee structure is needed for wastewater operator certification exams and renewals. Without the proposed fee increase, the Operator Training and Certification Unit will lose 3 FTE positions and discontinue the operator certification training.

Proposed Fee Increase

The proposed fee increase proposal would require new operator certification examination and renewal fees on participants. The Department utilized a stakeholders group which helped the Department develop the current proposal. The new fees are estimated to generate approximately \$356,000 in revenue for the program. The funding would be used to maintain the staff needed to provide the operator certification training and the examination and renewals of current operators.

The new fee structure would include an exam fee to be paid by operators. Exams only need to be taken by facility operators once during their career to show proficiency in that area of expertise, unless they allow their certification to expire. The new exam fees range from \$30 to \$70. The new fee structure would also include certification renewal fees. The operator does not need to take an exam for a renewal, but must submit a renewal application and show that they have completed the required continuing education credits in their field. For Drinking Water and Municipal Wastewater operators, the certifications are issued on a 3-year cycle. Industrial

Wastewater, Storm Water, and CAFO certifications are issued for 5 years. Thus, the new certification renewal fee of \$95 would be paid by the operator every 3 or 5 years, depending upon the type of facility for which they are being recertified.

I hope you have found this information helpful. If you have questions or need further clarification, feel free to contact me at 3-8080.