

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII



KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., M.P.H., M.G.A.
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STATE OF HAWAII
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

December 31, 2025

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi,
President and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura,
Speaker
and Members of the House of
Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the Annual Report on the Activities of the Board of Certification of Operating Personnel in Wastewater Treatment Facilities During State Fiscal Year 2025 to the Legislature, pursuant to Chapter 340B, Section 12, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawaii Revised Statutes, I am also informing you that the report may be viewed electronically at:

<https://health.hawaii.gov/opppd/department-of-health-reports-to-2026-legislature/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Fink".

Kenneth S. Fink, M.D., M.P.H., M.G.A.
Director of Health

Enclosures

c: Legislative Reference Bureau
Hawaii State Library System (2)
Hamilton Library

**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
STATE OF HAWAI'I
2026**

**BOARD OF CERTIFICATION OF
OPERATING PERSONNEL IN
WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES
STATE FISCAL YEAR 2025**

**PURSUANT TO SECTION 340B-12
HAWAI'I REVISED STATUTES**

**PREPARED BY:
STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BOARD OF CERTIFICATION OF OPERATING PERSONNEL IN
WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES**

DECEMBER 2025

BOARD OF CERTIFICATION OF OPERATING PERSONNEL IN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT FACILITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Board of Certification of Operating Personnel in Wastewater Treatment Plants (Board) conducted seven (7) meetings during state fiscal year (SFY) 2025. There were abundant agenda items, time constraints, and budget concerns during these meetings. The Board was able to make progress on, but did not complete tasks seen as important, which included organizing its files and records. The Board continued offering computer-based testing model (CBT) for operator certification exams. The CBT exams are an option to written paper exams that are available on O‘ahu, Maui, Kaua‘i, and Hawai‘i islands. There was no time available to discuss proposed changes to certification rules under Chapter 11-61, Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR).

Written paper operator certification examinations were administered by Board members statewide in the months of August 2024 and February 2025 to twenty (20) applicants, with two (2) successfully passing the examinations, for an overall written paper passing rate of 10%, which is slightly lower than last year’s rate of 14%.

- August 2024: 16 applicants
 - Passing: 1 applicant
- February 2025: 4 applicants
 - Passing: 1 applicant
- Total: 20 applicants
 - Passing: 2 applicants

CBTs have become more popular than written tests. For SFY 2025, there were seventy-five (75) applicants with twenty (20) passing their examinations for a CBT passing rate of 27%. The passing rate is lower than last year with twenty-eight (28) applicants and nine (9) passing their examinations for a passing rate of 32%.

- SFY 2025: 75 tests
- SFY 2024: 28 tests
- SFY 2023: 63 tests
- SFY 2022: 65 tests
- SFY 2021: 95 tests
- SFY 2020: 85 tests
- SFY 2019: 94 tests
- SFY 2018: 120 tests
- SFY 2017: 146 tests

Passing rates for each grade fluctuate over the years. Average passing rates for operators taking Grade 3 and Grade 4 exams are typically lower than for operators taking Grade 1 and Grade 2 exams. This is because Grade 3 and Grade 4 exams require the operator to have more advanced knowledge of the operation and maintenance of a wide variety of wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) processes (including many that the operators may not have first-hand experience with)

and contain more complex problems than the Grade 1 and 2 exams. The passing rates for CBT are much greater than those for the written paper examinations.

A total of 260 WWTP operators have permanent Grade 1 through Grade 4 operator certificates in Hawai'i (October 16, 2022 – October 15, 2024), which is experiencing a downward trend (e.g., October 16, start-year – October 15, end-year):

- 2024-26: 260
- 2022-24: 278
- 2020-22: 294
- 2018-20: 312
- 2016-18: 325
- 2014-16: 346
- 2012-14: 385
- 2010-12: 405

This trend is expected to continue, and in the next several years it is anticipated that treatment plants will face a critical shortage of operators due to expected retirements of 37% of the workforce (January 2009 ABC Conference). Nationwide projections for the next four to six years indicate that for every 10 operators retiring only four will be replaced (January 2009 ABC Conference). Incentives and additional training opportunities must be developed to retain senior operators longer, and to recruit and impart the skills needed for junior operators to pass their certification exams.

Significant Board actions during SFY 2025 include:

- Reviewing applications for examinations.
- Conducting two written wastewater operator certification examinations.
- Conducting continuous computer-based, operator certification examinations.
- Classifying WWTPs.
- Evaluating applications for issuing reciprocity certifications.
- Evaluating operator college transcripts, outside training courses, and workshops for granting continuing educational units.
- Implementing Chapter 11-61, HAR, for the mandatory certification of operating personnel in WWTPs.
- Issuing permanent and temporary operator certificates.

The State of Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) established the Statewide Wastewater Operator Training Center (SWOTC) in September 1988. State budget cuts forced elimination of the SWOTC Coordinator position in November 2009. In July 2015, DOH transferred the complete operation and management of the operator training program to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Water Resources Research Center (WRRC), which now independently runs the SWOTC and offers classes statewide funded by the counties.

Act 238, Session Laws of Hawai‘i (SLH) 1999 amended Chapter 340B, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (HRS) to establish the Wastewater Treatment Certification Board Special Fund. The revenues for this fund are generated from monies collected for registration, certificate renewal, reciprocity, and temporary certificates are used specifically for defraying the costs of the operations of the Board. In SFY 2025, \$17,522.21 in revenues was collected. At the end of the fiscal year, a cash balance of \$68,252.22 existed in the fund.

SFY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT
BOARD OF CERTIFICATION OF OPERATING PERSONNEL
IN WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Effective operation and maintenance of wastewater treatment works are essential to prevent pollution of the waters of the state and protect public health. Also, the efficient management of wastewater treatment works is an important economic asset to the public, to county and state officials, and to operators. Furthermore, certification of wastewater treatment works operators assures the employment of personnel competent to provide proper operation and maintenance, and efficient and cost-effective management of wastewater treatment works.

This Annual Report summarizes the Board of Certification of Operating Personnel in Wastewater Treatment Plants (Board) activities and accomplishments during SFY 2025. It also provides information about the Board's organizational structure.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Board is placed, for administrative purposes, in the Department of Health (DOH). The nine (9) members of the Board are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature for four-year terms. The present Board is comprised of the following members, which includes representatives from each of the major counties of the State, as required by Chapter 340B, HRS:

- Emily Dong - Professional Engineer, private practice
- Jon Nakashima - Certified Operator, County of Kaua'i
- Maria Yamashita - State of Hawaii, DOH

The following Board members are inactive, but are in the process of reapplying as Board members. Three (3) of the four (4) inactive Board members have served a maximum term of eight (8) years. However, there were no applicants for new Board members and because quorum is required in order to continue this essential function, the three (3) termed-out Board members are requesting renewal of their Board membership.

- Robert Souza - Board Chair, Certified Operator, City and County of Honolulu
- Kevin Nakamura - Certified Operator, private practice
- Virgilio Viernes - Certified Operator, County of Maui
- Gary Hutchinson - Hawai'i Water Environment Association (HWEA)

The following Board member seats are vacant. The Board member seat representing the County of Hawai'i has been vacant since the March 2010 Board meeting.

- Vacant - Certified Operator, County of Hawai'i
- Vacant - Faculty, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Engineering

BOARD MEETINGS DURING SFY 2025

During SFY 2025, the Board held eight (8) meetings on:

September 26, 2024	March 6, 2025
October 11, 2024	April 25, 2025
October 24, 2024	May 9, 2025
December 5, 2024	June 26, 2025

There has been a noticeable increase in meeting agenda items as operators have become more involved on certification issues than in the past. These additional agenda items require more of the Board's time and have limited the Board's ability to discuss revisions to Chapter 11-61, HAR, which governs the operator certification program.

SUMMARY OF CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS

The Board conducted two (2) written paper examinations for all grades of WWTP operators during SFY 2025. The exam was held in August 2024 (Statewide) and February 2025 (Kaua'i). The results of this examination are depicted in the following table:

August 2024 and February 2025 Written Paper Examinations

August 2024				February 2025			
Grade	Pass	Applicants	Passing %	Grade	Pass	Applicants	Passing %
1	1	4	25%	1	1	1	100%
2	0	4	0%	2	0	3	0%
3	0	5	0%	3	0	0	0%
4	0	3	0%	4	0	0	0%
Total	1	16	6%	Total	1	4	25%

SFY25			
Grade	Pass	Applicants	Passing %
1	2	5	40%
2	0	7	0%
3	0	5	0%
4	0	3	0%
Total	2	20	10%

The Board also facilitated continuous CBTs for all grades of operators which are depicted in the following table:

Computer-Based Tests taken during SFY 2025

CBT SFY 2025			
Grade	Pass	Applicants	Passing %
1	8	17	47%
2	5	23	22%
3	3	13	23%
4	4	22	18%
Total	20	75	27%

**COMPARISON OF PASSING PERCENTAGES ON WRITTEN EXAMS
Statewide**

Date of Exam	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
February 2025	100	0	0	0
August 2024	25	0	0	0
February 2024	0	25	100	0
August 2023	33	0	0	0
February 2023	0	20	0	33
August 2022	40	0	0	13
February 2022	40	0	0	0
August 2021	20	25	0	0
August 2020	29	33	0	0
August 2019	50	0	0	0
August 2018	33	20	0	20
February 2018	70	17	22	11
August 2017	17	43	13	0
February 2017	46	50	17	31
August 2016	31	17	75	7
February 2016	44	40	18	11
August 2015	43	36	22	0
February 2015	44	28	16	11
August 2014	47	17	18	7
February 2014	57	50	19	8
August 2013	36	39	14	5
February 2013	50	55	62	9
August 2012	60	50	17	29
February 2012	35	25	56	14
August 2011	67	67	42	50
February 2011	55	50	32	4
August 2010	27	24	20	0
February 2010	79	64	31	10
August 2009	46	24	8	5
February 2009	52	45	57	10
August 2008	50	41	10	6

Statistics:

A total of twenty (20) written paper examinations were taken in SFY 2025 of which two (2) operators passed their exams for an overall passing rate of 10%. A total of seventy-five (75) CBTs were taken in SFY 2025 of which twenty (20) operators passed their exams for an overall passing rate of 27%. If the written paper and CBTs results are combined, there were ninety-five (95) exams and twenty-two (22) passes for a rate of 23% which is lower than the SFY 2024 passing rate of 24%.

As shown in the table above, the passing percentages for all grades have fluctuated over the years.

In general, Grades 1 and 2 have higher passing rates than for Grades 3 and 4. This is because Grade 3 and Grade 4 exams require the operator to have more advanced knowledge of the operation and maintenance of a wide variety of WWTP processes (including many that the operators may not have first-hand experience with) and contain more complex problems than the Grade 1 and 2 exams.

Operators are encouraged to enroll in courses offered by the Statewide Wastewater Operator Training Center (SWOTC) and correspondence courses provided by California State University Sacramento (CSUS). Additional training courses from other sources including online web-based courses are evaluated and approved by the Board to enhance the operator's learning progress.

The Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) Certification Examination questions reference the courses offered by CSUS. Analysis has proven that the majority of the operators who have completed the CSUS courses and taken courses offered by the Training Center are passing the ABC Certification examinations.

Statewide Wastewater Operator Training Center (SWOTC)

The DOH established the training center 30 years ago in September 1988. Due to budget constraints, the State eliminated the SWOTC Coordinator position in November 2009. From September 2010 through June 2015, operator training was coordinated by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, WRRC with DOH maintaining control of financial matters. DOH turned over the operation and management completely to WRRC on July 1, 2015, which is now being operated by WRRC with financial support from the Counties (website: <http://www.wrrc.hawaii.edu/swotc.shtml>).

Training courses included introductory basic wastewater courses to more complex advanced courses in activated sludge, sludge conditioning, and anaerobic digestion.

Exam participants who have successfully completed WWTP operator courses with the training center have traditionally performed better on exams than those who did not participate in the training program. The SWOTC provides an important role in the certification of WWTP operators statewide.

Wastewater Branch, State Department of Health

The Construction and Operations Section of the Wastewater Branch has assisted the Board by providing information and vital data for all WWTPs requiring classification. Wastewater Branch inspection reports of WWTPs are used by the Board to classify new plants as they are constructed. This ensures that certified operators possessing skills commensurate with a WWTP's classification rating are operating the WWTP. The Board currently maintains a database of approximately 180 classified WWTPs in the state.

Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Credits

The Board reviews operator requests to evaluate college transcripts, certificates of completion for workshops, conferences, and short training courses for approval of allowable continuing education unit (CEU) credits. These CEUs are needed by operators to show that the applicant has met the educational requirements for operator certification examinations. Applicants must also show appropriate years of WWTP operating experience was obtained in order to qualify for various grade levels of certification.

The January 2002 amendments to Chapter 11-61, HAR, changed the renewal period for active operator certificates to every two (2) years instead of annually. This change allowed the Board to reduce paperwork and the cost associated with annual renewals, which is comparable with other ABC member states. The amendments also require operators to obtain two (2) CEU credits prior to renewing their operator certificates. In recent years, this requirement resulted in a substantial increase in the number of operator requests for Board review to determine allowable CEU credits for college transcripts, workshops, and short courses attended by operators.

Significant Board Actions

The primary goal of the certification program is to ensure that all WWTPs are operated by qualified personnel. During the SFY 2025, the Board achieved the following objectives:

1. Continued to review and determine the number of CEUs allowed for satisfactory completion of new training courses offered by other institutions;
2. Resolved operator concerns on applications, qualifications for examination, and certificate renewal requirements;
3. Continued to inform operators of the Board's functions and decisions via minutes of the Board meetings. Board minutes are accessible to operators and are available on the Board's website at: <http://health.hawaii.gov/wastewater/home/boc>

Meetings are open to the public and any operator interested in making a presentation before the Board;

- Continued contracting with Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) Testing for the development and scoring of operator certification examinations. The ABC Wastewater Treatment Operator examinations consist of 100 questions selected by experts and validated to create nationally standardized examinations that are used in all 50 states. Scoring 70% or higher on the exam is required to pass the exams. The ABC written paper tests will continue to only be offered annually on all islands in August.

Since 2013-14 the Board has contracted with AMP Corp to offer CBT in Honolulu as an option available to all operators at an additional cost to the operator (\$90). CBTs are offered in three counties (Honolulu, Maui, and Hawai'i).

Operators are allowed to take a test up to three (3) times in a calendar year using any combination of written paper and CBT;

- Continued to provide information to operators and other agencies about Hawai'i's certification program. Provided listings of operator CEUs earned, training completed and issued new certified operator certificates;
- Continued to review and update all forms and related instructional sheets; and
- Implemented amendments to Title 11, Chapter 61, HAR, Mandatory Certification of Operating Personnel in Wastewater Treatment Facilities, dated January 20, 2002.

Schedule of Meetings for SFY 2026

The Board plans to schedule meetings approximately every other month with additional meetings as necessary. Meetings scheduled for SFY 2026 are as follows:

September 19, 2025	March 2026 (TBD)
October 16, 2025	May 2026 (TBD)
October 17, 2025	June 2026 (TBD)
December 11, 2025	
December 12, 2025	

General business conducted at these meetings includes:

- Providing an informational meeting for operators in attendance;
- Reviewing and processing applications for certification examinations, selecting Certification exam questions and discussing the results of the exams;
- Reviewing and preparing responses to correspondence received from operating personnel and other agencies;
- Reviewing, and approving or denying operator applications for Temporary Certificates;

5. Reviewing and issuing Reciprocity Certificates to qualifying operators moving to Hawai'i from other states; and
6. Reviewing, and approving or denying operator certificate renewals.

REVENUES AND EXPENSES

Expenses During the Fiscal Year (July 2024 to June 2025):

Object Code	Title	Cost
3020	ABC Examinations	\$1,078.00
3210	Office Supplies	\$10.48
3510	Membership Dues	\$900.00
3710	Postage	\$511.15
3810	Telephone & Telegraph	\$508.25
4290	Intra-State Transportation-Others	\$2,475.10
4390	Subsistence Allowance, Intra-State- Others	\$1,896.65
4395	Excess Lodging, Intra-State-Others	\$1,372.67
4690	Hire of Passenger Carts-Others	\$850.00
5620	Rental of Office Equipment	\$187.74
7210	Trng. Costs & Registration Fees	\$700.00
7290	Other Misc. Current Expenditures	\$1,027.22
	Total	\$11,517.26

Funding for the Board

Act 238, SLH 1999 amended chapter 340B HRS which established the Wastewater Treatment Certification Board Special Fund. The revenues for this fund are generated from moneys collected for registrations, renewals, reciprocity and new certificates and are to be used specifically for financing the operations of the Board. During SFY 2024, revenues from application fees were \$10,150.72 as compared to last fiscal year's revenues of \$18,591.61. Revenues vary each year and are typically more during operator certificate renewal years.

Fiscal Situation

For SFY 2025, the Board had an annual budget of \$28,021. Total expenses were \$11,517.26. Total personnel amount was \$65,472.00. The Board will continue to use appropriate procedures to manage its budget.

Any current or future budget restrictions will hamper Board efforts to schedule additional meetings for rule amendments and to administer Chapter 11-61, HAR, entitled “Mandatory Certification of Wastewater Treatment Personnel in Wastewater Treatment Plants.” Further budget reductions will severely restrict the Board’s ability to administer the operator certification program.

At the close of the SFY 2025, there was a cash balance of \$68,252.22 in the special fund account.

Recommendation

The Board is in need of administrative support personnel to administer Chapter 11-61, HAR. Currently, the Board is a “working board” that must screen and review each of the hundreds of applications for certificate renewals, exams, requests for reciprocity, and CEUs, which consume much of the Board’s time and effort at meetings. Second day meetings are needed to address the deferment of agenda items and developing important and much needed amendments to Chapter 11-61, HAR. Ideally, as done in other states, a certification program coordinator with dedicated support staff should be established to administer the program.