

Innovation in Action

Water/wastewater Operator Certification Goes Digital

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For seven years, a small group in the Drinking Water and Wastewater Certification section has advocated for a web-based, interactive tool to manage more than 2,800 department-certified water and wastewater operators of 1,200 regulated facilities and systems. This involves 800 yearly applications and upwards of 900 annual renewals. In January, the vision became reality.

The *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* requires that specified municipal water and wastewater facilities have one or more certified operators to supervise day-to-day operations. Once certified, operators are required to renew every three years, providing both work experience information and proof of the required approved training units.

The management of all provincially certified operators is the responsibility of the department's Water and Wastewater Operator Certification Program, in place since 1975.

Until January 2 of this year, the team used a Microsoft Access database and paper files to track operators' certification information. The labor-intensive system made it impossible for operators to see what information was on their files in a timely manner, so both operators and certification staff identified the need for a system that made records available in real-time.



Tanya Hunter and Vernice Bello pulling individual operator paper files to process applications.

In 2018, a vendor (SyLogix) was selected to customize an existing cloud-based system, Compliance365, to enable the office to move to a fully digital process.

The new system launched on January 2, giving all operators in the province access to this innovative, cloud-based approach to tracking their certification and education.

Compliance 365 has been received enthusiastically by operators. To date, it has already processed 270 applications and approved 2,200 training submissions.

Alberta's certified water and wastewater operators are vital to our communities, providing safe drinking water to Albertans and helping to protect the environment in which we live. Special kudos go out to Tanya Hunter and Vernice Bello for their persistence and perseverance on operators' behalf.

This is not the office's first experience with "going digital." In 2017, the Program introduced a computer-based testing model for exams. It started as a pilot project but has progressed to 95 percent of exams being

administered online. By taking advantage of an already existing contract, the Program identified eight locations across the province in which operators (once approved) have 30 days to schedule their exam. The number of exam sessions was increased from two times per year to six, and operators now walk away from exam sessions knowing whether they passed or failed; the paper-based model took up to six weeks for results.

These online exam results are now uploaded into Compliance 365, enabling certified operators to print off their own certificates.

Using cloud-based business processes for managing the certification program is industry-leading in Canada, and it demonstrates Alberta Environment and Parks' commitment to protecting drinking water quality and aquatic health.



Information on 2,800 operators is now contained in the Compliance 365 online portal.

If you have any questions about Compliance 365 or drinking water and wastewater certification, please email Tanya.Hunter@gov.ab.ca or Vernice.Bello@gov.ab.ca.