



[Understanding the Pathway to Becoming a Drinking Water Operator in Massachusetts](#)

What is a drinking water operator? A drinking water operator is a licensed professional who works in a public water system’s distribution system or treatment plant ensuring that water supplied to customers meets all the regulatory requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. Community public water systems are required to have a primary and secondary operator, and many require other employees working in the water system to have a license as well. For a glimpse of what it is like to work in water operations, view our short video by scanning the QR code or visiting: https://youtu.be/KD_xbJOk0Bg



What skills are desired in a water operator? A drinking water operator is responsible for protecting public health and safety by providing a safe supply of drinking water. Operators must have the ability to understand and comply with laws and regulations related to water supply. They must exhibit sound decision-making. They must have appropriate math skills. Mechanical aptitude is helpful in some positions. Minimum educational requirements are a high school diploma, and higher-level licenses require some specialized training (see below).



What is the work environment like? Operators’ duties vary by water system. In smaller water systems, an operator might have to perform both distribution and treatment duties, while in larger systems, the work is usually more segregated. Distribution system operators are often out in the field working on pipes and pumps; they may take water samples and respond to emergency situations like water main breaks. Treatment plant operators work in plants monitoring the processes, adding chemicals, and making sure the treatment plant is running effectively. Some of the larger treatment plants run three working shifts.



What is the job outlook? Solid opportunities exist! The current workforce is aging, and a significant percentage is approaching retirement age. More openings are expected in the next 5-10 years. Water works associations often receive job postings for operator positions. Visit: masswaterworks.org/jobs and newwa.org/careercenter.aspx to view the latest openings.



Licensing: In Massachusetts, operators are licensed by the Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities. There are 4 Grades of licenses for Distribution and Treatment, as well as licensing for operators of Very Small Water Systems or Vending Machine operators. To obtain a license, an interested candidate will need to take an exam. The Grade 1-4 exams must be taken sequentially (you do not have to apply for the license at each level, i.e. if you are interested in obtaining a Grade 4 Treatment license you have to take the 4 exams, but you do not need to apply for and hold the Grade 2 license before you can take a Grade 3 exam). There are prerequisite course requirements that must be met prior to sitting for an exam for a Grade 2 and higher license. Operators who pass the exam may apply to the Board for the license, the Board may grant an “Operator in Training” or “Full” license depending on the applicant’s education and experience. See the following worksheet to help determine status: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/education-and-experience-requirements-worksheet-0/>



Licensing:

DISTRIBUTION	Requirements	Where could you use the license
Very Small System (VSS)	No course requirements	Non-Community Public Water Systems or communities serving under 500 population
Grade 1 Distribution (D1)	No course requirements	Communities serving 501-1,500 population
Grade 2 Distribution (D2)	Must take a Board approved Distribution (D2-4) Course	Communities serving 1,501-15,000 population
Grade 3 Distribution (D3)	Must take a Board approved Distribution (D2-4) Course	Communities serving 15,001-50,000 population
Grade 4 Distribution (D4)	Must take a Board approved Distribution (D2-4) Course	Communities serving greater than 50,001 population
TREATMENT	Requirements	Where could you use the license
Grade 1 Treatment (T1)	No course requirements	Class I-T (determined by the complexity of the Treatment Process)
Grade 2 Treatment (T2)	Must take a Board approved Basic Treatment Course	Class II-T (determined by the complexity of the Treatment Process)
Grade 3 Treatment (T3)	Must take a Board approved Advanced Treatment Course	Class III-T (determined by the complexity of the Treatment Process)
Grade 4 Treatment (T4)	Must take a Board approved Advanced Treatment Course	Class IV-T (determined by the complexity of the Treatment Process)

Where can I take a Board-approved course?

- For a list of all Board of Certification Approved Courses, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/board-of-certification-of-operators-of-drinking-water-supply-facilities-approved-education-courses-to-sit-for-examination>
- **Massachusetts Water Works Association** has approval from the MA Board of Certification for the three required courses needed for higher level licenses (Distribution, Basic Treatment, and Advanced Treatment) and offers them in a variety of formats (in-person, virtual via Zoom, and self-paced in partnership with Springfield Technical Community College). MWWA also offers training for operators who are new to the field who need assistance in preparing for the Treatment Grade 1 (T1) or Distribution Grade 1 (D1) licensing exam, visit: masswaterworks.org



Exam Resources:

- gowpi.org – Water Professionals International: The Associated Boards of Certification, developers of the distribution and treatment exams. While there, view the “Need to Know Criteria.”
- psiexams.com – PSI Services, LLC is authorized to administer the Distribution and Treatment exams to Massachusetts operators. You will use this website to register for the exam. The computer-based exams are offered at PSI testing centers around the state. The cost of each exam is around \$100.

Career Resources

- Water Works: Careers with Purpose (Day in the Life, 4 min.): <https://youtu.be/k0iJD7NARs>
- Water Works: Careers with Purpose (Quick Career Intro, 38 sec.): <https://youtu.be/xoetWTaGQjY>
- Visit USEPA’s Water Sector Workforce website and scroll to the link for “Water you Waiting for?” a series of brief videos describing the career opportunities: epa.gov/dwcapacity/water-you-waiting
- Work for Water: workforwater.org

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