

**Minutes**  
**COMMITTEE OF CERTIFICATION**  
**July 19, 2022, 3:30 PM**  
**Lake Charles Civic Center, Contraband Room**  
**900 N Lakeshore Dr**  
**Lake Charles, LA 70601**

**1.) ROLL CALL**

A. Determination of Quorum.

Committee Members in attendance: Camille Mize – Chairman, Ronald Turner, Patrick Edmond, Sidney Bazley, Vern Breland, Brandon Snead, Amanda Ames

Committee Members Absent: Joanne Massony

A quorum was achieved.

Recognition of Visitors and Others: Rusty Reeves, LRWA, Jeron Wheeler

LDH personnel in attendance: Esteban Gonzalez, Reyna Anderson Duffus, Barbara Featherston, Jennifer Khilken, Hannah Beatty.

**2.) MINUTES**

The minutes from the July 20, 2021 meeting was presented. Motion by Ronald Turner, Second by Amanda Ames to approve meeting minutes as presented. Motion was approved.

**3.) CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

No Chairman's Report.

**4.) ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

Previous administrator Tom Walton has retired. Presented himself (Esteban Gonzalez) as new administrator.

Operator Certification program is starting to tour water and wastewater plants throughout Louisiana in order to meet operators face and face and learn more about current challenges in industry. Currently visited Denham springs water and wastewater, St. John's water and wastewater, and Baton Rouge wastewater.

Operator Certification program intends to begin newsletter for all operators soon via email in order to more readily send program updates.

The Administrator noted that other information will be discussed in the Old and New Business.

**5.) TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT**

Have scheduled 7 exams. 5 were completed. August and September of 2021 were cancelled due to Covid-19. On average about 70% of operators show up to scheduled exams. This is 30% of

applications that are reviewed and packets that are created that are not used. Exam this Friday has 489 registered to test. This number is up by about 100 from last year so we are coming back to pre Covid numbers.

Handed out exam reports for 2021 and 2022 listing how many students took each exam, locations and if the exams were open or closed.

#### **6.) SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Section ended with two significant bills, Senate bill 129 by Senator Mills that will require LDH to grade water systems by January 2023. Another item to note is the American Rescue Plan money, 300 million dollars, 150 million dollars for each water and wastewater systems, HB642 established a water sector commission with monies being funneled through the Division of Administration. Projects will have to be submitted. Water will go through LDH with wastewater going through LDEQ. All projects will have to go through the water sector commission to approve or not approve. If approved, then go through JLTB for release of funds. All monies have to be spent within 3 years with no guidelines yet. The water sector commission will be meeting soon at which time guidelines will be approved.

Grade rule was finalized in April 2022 so grades will come out for water systems beginning in January 2023. Having a duly certified operator at the proper level does impact the grade of the water system. Grade includes operation and maintenance as well as financials, management, and customer support.

There are new rules that will be coming out over the next couple of years that will impact water systems. As an agency LDH is currently determining what the requirements will be.

#### **7.) ASSOCIATION REPORTS**

**Louisiana Conference** – No report, no one in attendance for the Louisiana Conference.

**LRWA** – Rusty Reeves – Annual Conference has a little over 1,000. 154 exhibit booths.

Approximately 460 students seeking hours or certifications. Mini-Conference coming up in October will include certification classes and more technical classes.

**LWEA** – No report, no one in attendance for LWEA.

#### **8.) OLD BUSINESS**

##### Fake High School Diploma – Administrative Hearing

George Bickford – Was not present and did not have a representative present.

Was contacted by the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff Department concerning operator, Mr. George A. Bickford, had falsified a high school diploma. The Independence Police Department subpoena records from the Tangipahoa School System. The school system has no record of Mr. Bickford graduating from Loranger High School on May 20, 1995. The highest grade shown on his records was 9th grade. The Program Manager of Operator Certification contacted the State Department of Education and they have no record of Mr. Bickford graduating high school. After Discussion, Motion to remove all licenses from Mr. Bickford by Camille Mize, Second by Ronald Turner. Motion for provision to allow to retest if Mr. Bickford gets a HS Diploma or GED and

presents himself before the Committee of Certification along with a professional recommendation by Camille Mize, Second by Amanda Ames.

**9.) NEW BUSINESS**

Reciprocity Requests

Chris P. Totaro from Mississippi, recommend Class 4 Wastewater Treatment, Class 4 Wastewater Collection

Brandon Obenshain from Texas, recommend Class 3 Wastewater Treatment, Class 3 Wastewater Collection

Montgomer A. Sedlak from Arkansas, Colorado, and ABC, recommend Class 3 Wastewater Treatment, Class 3 Wastewater Collection

Aaron M. Basso from Mississippi, recommend Class 3 Wastewater Treatment

Dawn Harrell from Mississippi, recommend Class 4 Water Treatment

Recommend denials to Aaron Bagwell and Adam Joslin. Both have Water Treatment Specialist II certifications from Texas. This is provided to individuals who do contract installs and related maintenance for portable equipment but do not perform any duties or functions of a certified operator and do not count as operators in Texas.

Motion to approve all reciprocity recommendations by Camille Mize, second by Ronald Turner. Motion was approved.

Operator complaint against Mr. Chris Hughes.

Camille Mize is recusing herself due to a personal relationship with Chris Hughes.

Chris Hughes was not present at meeting but did call in.

Complaint by Mr. Jimmy Cooley, EHS Manager at Ardagh Glass. States that operator has not been onsite every day as required. With Mr. Hughes not onsite, the provided onsite tech replaced a barrel of Chlorine with Ultron 8187 instead of Chlorine. Head of Ardagh Engineering has communicated with Mr. Hughes that he needs to be present every day. Personnel at Ardagh will test for water certifications in order to no longer receive services from Mr. Hughes and they instructed all personnel at their plant not to drink water until testing confirmed water was safe to drink. In a follow up email Mr. Cooley clarified the dates when the chlorine was changed as 5/24/2022 and corrected on 6/5/2022. Operator only checks chlorine residuals in system and adjusts feed rate of chlorine. Tech communicates with operator daily.

Chlorine residual log sheets were presented for POE and MRT. For the dates in question Mr. Hughes has initialed that there is a chlorine residual still present for May and June.

Mr. Hughes states that he was not there when chlorine was changed but plant would never let him change barrel himself since it requires a forklift. As far as chlorine residuals go 150k gallon elevated tank as well as a ground storage tank of approximated 70k gallons. This is not a normal system, it's for a plant and they do not use much water. Water well would run once for about an hour a day for about 12k gallons.

Letter from Curt Brown, maintenance tech at Ardagh. Wrong chemical was added to the system on afternoon of May 26 and corrected as soon as he realized mistake on May 31.

Mr. Hughes stated that he works full time somewhere else, he shows up once a day, but Mr. Brown would check flow and sample on-site and report to him if he was not able to.

Ms. Barbara Featherston, District Engineer for area advised that she was informed about the incorrect barrel of alum being swapped out. She was concerned but also aware that it is an industrial plant and water consumption is low. The more alarming concern was due to the chlorine residual reports because both the POE and MRT showed a chlorine residual when there was no chlorine being fed into system for several days and it should not have had any residual without any chlorine feed. The allegation from Mr. Cooley is that the chlorine was exchanged for alum and during that period the chlorine residuals were taken but did not reflect the lack of chlorine for the initialed dates of 5/28, 5/29, 5/30, 6/1, 6/3, 6/4. Mr. Hughes confirmed that he understands the allegation that he falsified records but states that he can only go from what his chlorometer states. Mr. Hughes states that he has never validated his chlorometer, upon clarification he stated that he does zero out the chlorometer every time a sample is tested. There is no independent data for the period in question from the state's sampling. After discussion, Motion to move to have a hearing by Ronald Turner, second by Vern Breland. Motion was approved

Expired Exam Score for Mr. Jeron Wheeler. Mr. Wheeler states that while he passed his Water Distribution 3, Wastewater Collection 4 on 2/7/2020. Exam scores are valid for two years and operator must meet requirements and apply for license before exam score expires. Mr. Wheeler stated that he was not able to apply for license in time because of the pandemic, he caught covid. In December of 2020 he had a twins but his son passed away soon after birth and he could not focus on anything else. After discussion, Motion to approve application for expired exam scores by Amanda Ames, second by Camille Mize.

Operator Certification Rule time for meeting did not allow to have discussion regarding new rule. Recommendation that discussion was tabled.

**10.) COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC**

None

**11.) NEXT MEETING DATE**

October 19, 2022 in Alexandria, LA at LRWA's Mini-Conference at Randolph Civic Center.

**12.) ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Camille Mize to adjourn, Second by Ronald Turner. Motion was approved.