

THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION ON VEOLIA'S VICTORIAN OPERATIONS



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ABSTRACT

In September 2010 the Victorian Department of Health (DoH) issued the “*Victorian Framework for Water Treatment Operator Competencies – Best Practice Guidelines*” (the Guidelines). The Guidelines define the minimum training, qualification and competency standards that operators must attain and maintain in order to operate drinking water treatment facilities in Victoria. An important aspect of the Guidelines is the development of an Operator Certification Scheme which recognises the professionalism of water operators. Currently WIOA has the first and only such certification scheme endorsed by the Department of Health in Victoria. Veolia have put together a steering group responsible for managing the transition of training, competency and certification under the new Guidelines. Arising out of the steering group, a project management team has been created responsible for ensuring operators achieve competency levels, as well as development of operator refresher training programs suitable for operator certification. The long term goal is for the training strategies and systems developed in Victoria to be influential in the implementation of operator competency and certification programs across all of Veolia's Australian operations. This will ensure that Veolia is able to operate at a level that achieves industry “best practice” and meets the needs of our clients Australia-wide.

KEY WORDS

Training, Professional Development, Certification.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The WIOA Certification Scheme

Currently WIOA has the first and only certification scheme endorsed by the Victorian Department of Health, which would certify operators to a level of competency and would then re-certify operators every three years, using an evidence based points system for ongoing training and professional development.

The WIOA Certification Scheme will initially be rolled out for small town, city and metropolitan service providers:

- urban potable water treatment system operators
- urban potable water reticulation system operators
- urban wastewater operators, and
- urban Class A recycled water system operators

In the future there is scope to extend this system to staff involved with rural water operations. This would include staff that control and operate catchments and bulk water collection and distribution systems.

1.2 How WIOA's Certification Scheme works

The aim of the Certification Scheme is to verify that an individual is qualified to perform a particular job in the water industry. By being certified the individual is recognised as having a specific set of knowledge, skills, experience and abilities.

Each certification category requires evidence to show relevant industry experience, a set of training related skills that are considered the minimum required for working in that particular occupation, and a requirement to keep skills and knowledge current. The process of certification is structured as follows:

Step 1. Documentation of industry experience

An applicant provides documentation to show relevant experience in one of the certification categories described in section 1.1. This experience must total more than three years in an operational role.

Step 2. Documentation of skills from a training provider

An applicant must show evidence of completion of accredited training such as Certificates, Statements of Attainment or official student records from an approved Registered Training Organisation.

Step 3. Application for certification

The applicant completes and submits an application form accompanied by the certification fee to WIOA. Applicants must also commit to a professional Code of Conduct

Step 4. Periodic certification renewal

To ensure that certified operations practitioners keep their skills up-to-date there is a process requiring certification to be renewed every three years. Certified Operational Practitioners will need to show that they have remained active in the industry and that they have taken steps to keep up-to-date with new technology. They do this by meeting the prescribed number of 15 certification points in each three year period under WIOA's Certification Scheme.

2.0 VEOLIA'S APPROACH TO CERTIFICATION

2.1 The Challenges of Implementing an Operator Certification System

There are a number of features of a non-government, international water business such as Veolia, that make the implementation of an Operator Certification Scheme challenging.

These include:

- Balancing the needs of multiple contracts across the country and ensuring individual client needs are met at all times.
- Providing a consistent training delivery and training quality framework for water, wastewater and recycled water operational competencies that is applicable across state borders and even in different countries (e.g. New Zealand).
- Finding suitable training options that cover highly technical treatment processes such as ozone, biological activated carbon, microfiltration, ion exchange and reverse osmosis.
- Designing a certification program that can be "nationalised" to fit our various regional operations.
- Customising certification to meet the needs of the Veolia business plan, as well as our corporate vision, values and drivers for excellence in quality, safety and environment.

2.2 Planning and Implementation of Operator Certification

As part of ongoing staff professional development, Veolia is developing a Refresher Training Program that will meet the needs of Veolia's business as well as fulfilling the requirements of the Guidelines and the WIOA Certification Scheme. A steering group has been put together, which is responsible for managing the transition of training, competency and certification. Arising out of the steering group, a project management team has been created responsible for development of operator refresher training initiatives suitable for operator certification through WIOA.

The important issues that are being addressed by this team include:

- Finding a balance between the requirements of WIOA Certification Scheme & Veolia's own quality, safety and environmental systems
- Working co-operatively with the WIOA executive to facilitate Veolia's Refresher Training Program endorsement by WIOA.
- Development of robust training programs that utilise the skills and expertise of RTOs, industry experts, in-house trainers and other operators.
- Incorporation of operator certification into Veolia's Performance Appraisal and Development Plan framework.
- Development of a comprehensive training management database.

The training management database is important to the overall success of Veolia's Refresher Training Program. Currently in the final stages of development, the Veolia training management database will be used to manage all operator qualification and certification training requirements. The database will include all information pertaining to units of competency, work experience and certification requirements for each operator to enable the business to achieve compliance with the Guidelines and with Certification. The database will have provision for reporting on competency and refresher training requirements for individuals. These reports will be used to allocate training budgets as well as for performance management of operators.

A second key component of the Refresher Training Program is the linkage to Veolia's employee Performance Appraisal and Development Plan. Our approach to performance holds team members accountable for their own ongoing learning and career development. It also holds managers accountable for the overall performance of their areas, which includes supporting individual team members to develop and improve performance.

Through the different components, the Performance Appraisal and Development Plan aims to:

- Review the team member's performance of the past year
- Recognise the achievements of the team member
- Clarify any changes to the team member's role
- Plan for the coming year, and identify objectives and supporting activities
- Equip the team member with the necessary skills and/or resources to meet immediate and future challenges of their roles
- Provide guidance on career development

The Performance Appraisal and Development Plan process is a cycle that involves planning, checking and assessment. To begin the planning process, the team member and manager have a performance and development discussion to review overall expectations, which includes collaborating on the development of performance objectives.

Team member training and development goals are also clarified or updated. The result of this discussion is the Agreed Performance Appraisal that directs the team member's efforts towards achieving specific results to support organisational goals and objectives and team member success. The Agreed Performance Appraisal is discussed throughout the year to check progress. This provides a framework to ensure the team member achieves results through coaching and regular feedback.

Mapping the training and competency requirements of the Guidelines and WIOA's Operator Certification Scheme across to Veolia's Performance Appraisal and Development Plan process, will be key in the success of our implementation of certification into our operations. The Refresher Training Program will be designed in such a way to achieve these outcomes.

2.2 Development of a Refresher Training Program for Veolia

The Veolia operator refresher training program is designed to provide a framework for managing the training needs of operators to ensure they receive the ongoing training and professional development support required that will allow them to:

- maintain safe drinking water supplies, and
- ensure that wastewater treatment and recycled water systems are operated in a manner that protects both public safety and the environment.

The key components of the Veolia refresher training program will be:

- Mandatory attendance at a "water industry issues" update course as *designated and approved by DoH or EPA*. Operators will be required to attend this mandatory refresher training once every three years.
- Once an operator has achieved their Certificate III qualification, further national water package units of competency can be undertaken at any time as identified and agreed upon by the operator and their direct line manager through Veolia's Performance Appraisal and Development Plan.
- Completion of additional vocationally relevant, process based, refresher training. This includes completion of non-accredited training courses covering key process knowledge and/or skills, such as WIOA workshops, IWES courses or in-house training programs.
- Veolia will encourage all operators to get involved in the wider water industry and develop networks and contacts through attendance at conferences and trade shows.
- Encouraging participation in special projects and exceptional activities. This will include operators being given the opportunity to get involved in plant and process investigations. Exceptional activities will include opportunities for operators to go on rotation to other facilities within the region or interstate. Alternatively junior operators would be given the opportunity to be mentored by a senior operator from another part of the organisation, enabling expansion of contacts and networks across the organisation.

In addition to the above activities, which will be designed to enable operators to maintain certification, Veolia will incorporate an OHS&E component into the refresher training program, including mandatory training in the areas of:

- Chemical awareness
- First aid
- Manual handling

- Lock-out/tag-out
- Confined space
- Working from heights
- Environmental awareness/compliance

As well as implementation of a refresher training program, Veolia is committed to ongoing continuous improvement of its operational practices. This involves constant monitoring and feedback of training practices through periodic training reviews conducted by the training steering group and training project management team. As part of that commitment, Veolia will ensure that it continues to work towards compliance with the Guidelines and with operator certification in its current and future formats.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

In September 2010 the Victorian Department of Health issued the “Victorian Framework for Water Treatment Operator Competencies – Best Practice Guidelines”. An important part of this is the development of an Operator Certification Scheme. WIOA has the first certification scheme endorsed by the Department, which would certify operators using an evidence based points system for ongoing professional development. As part of staff professional development, Veolia is developing a Refresher Training Program that will meet the needs of Veolia’s business as well as fulfilling the requirements of the Guidelines and the WIOA certification scheme. The Veolia operator Refresher Training Program is designed to provide a framework for managing the training needs of operators to ensure they receive ongoing training and professional development support. The Refresher Training Program will be complemented by a training management database (currently in development). The program will also form an intrinsic part of Veolia’s Performance Appraisal and Development Plan for individual employees.

4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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5.0 REFERENCES

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