

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6325

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As of January 17, 2018

**Title:** An act relating to wastewater operator certifications.

**Brief Description:** Concerning wastewater operator certifications.

**Sponsors:** Senators McCoy, Palumbo, Takko, Hunt, Chase and Sheldon; by request of Department of Ecology.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Energy, Environment & Technology: 1/18/18.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires the Department of Ecology (Ecology) to establish and collect fees from wastewater operators to fully recover the costs of administering the program to certify wastewater operators.
- Requires Ecology to conduct a workload analysis and prepare a biennial budget estimate for the program.
- Specifies program element costs.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & TECHNOLOGY

**Staff:** Jan Odano (786-7486)

**Background:** Ecology implements the Wastewater Operator Certification program (program). To implement the program, Ecology is authorized to categorize wastewater treatment plants by size, type, and complexity to address the experience and skill level needed by a certified operator to protect the public health and the state's waters; determine qualifications and certification of operators for different classification of wastewater treatment plants; and to certify operators.

A wastewater treatment plant must be operated by a certified operator. There are five levels of wastewater certification in Washington. The certification levels range from an operator in training to Group IV. Each level of certification has education and experience requirements. All certification levels require a high school diploma or GED, in addition to specific

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experience and college credit. An applicant must take and pass an exam to become a certified operator. The application fee is \$50.

A wastewater operator certification is valid for up to three years. Upon certification renewal, the wastewater operator must present satisfactory evidence of professional growth along with a \$30 fee. Wastewater operators who fail to renew their certification must be suspended for 60 days. If the certification is not renewed within the 60 days, Ecology must revoke the certification. Wastewater operators who have had their certification revoked must reapply and meet all requirements as a new applicant.

Ecology is required to collect fees for issuing and renewing certificates sufficient to cover the cost of the certification program.

During the 2017 Legislative Session, the Legislature created the Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Certification Account for the receipt of all wastewater operator certification fees.

**Summary of Bill:** Ecology must establish and collect fees for issuance and renewal of wastewater operator certification. The fees must be in amounts necessary to fully recover the Ecology's costs to administer the program, as identified in its biennial operating budget.

The program costs include evaluating applications to verify compliance with certification requirements; administering examinations; ensuring operators receive necessary training; education and training of program staff; outreach and technical assistance; enforcement; and supporting program overhead administration expenses.

Ecology must conduct a workload analysis and prepare a biennial budget estimate for the program.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Wastewater treatment plants are the first line of defense to protect public health and the waters of our state. Certified professional wastewater treatment plant operators are needed to run these plants to ensure the public health and safety. The wastewater operator treatment plant program certifies operators. The fees have been set in statute for the last 36 years and have not kept pace with the costs of the program. The Water Quality program has subsidized the program. This bill will update the fee structure to align with current program costs and ensure the program is fully funded by operator certification fees.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Jason Norberg, Department of Ecology.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** PRO: Bruce Wishart, Puget Sound Keepers.

OTHER: Carl Schroeder, Association of Washington Cities.