

What About a Career as a Water Treatment Operator?

Most of us fill a glass from our kitchen faucet or freely use water in our homes without giving a thought to its source. Water treatment plant operators know exactly where that water comes from, where it goes and what happens to it to make it safe for use and human consumption.

Before water reaches the tap for the public to drink, it undergoes a series of purification and treatment processes according to laws described by the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. These laws make sure that water is safe for consumption and that wastewater is discharged in an environmentally safe manner. These processes are the responsibilities of water treatment operators.



Working as a water operator provides a secure career with opportunities for advancement and the possibility of lifetime work. A potential water treatment operator will need some training, and should have some mechanical aptitude and a basic understanding of math, chemistry and biology. Applicants with training will have the best chances of getting hired, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The federal government projects that job openings in the water treatment fields are likely to be plentiful as older workers retire and new plants come on line. In addition, water occupations are recession proof – regardless of the state of the economy, people need clean water to drink, and safe ways to dispose of used water.

According to the NY Department of Labor, employment projections in the water treatment fields are good. In New York there are projected to be 4,470 jobs in 2016, which is an increase of 40 from the 2014 number. In the Hudson Valley the average annual openings are 20 replacement positions.

The average wage in 2013 was \$56,140, with entry workers averaging \$38,830. Experienced workers averaged \$64,790.

Water operators are certified by the NY Department of Health and Wastewater operators are certified by the NY Department of Environmental Conservation. Certification requires a HS diploma or a GED, training, and on-the-job experience. Some training can be found on the job, and some in courses offered through associations or community colleges such as SUNY Ulster.

SUNY Ulster offers basic courses required for water and wastewater treatment operator certification. Each year, starting in September, courses required and approved by the NY Department of Health are offered, including Grades A, B, C, and D Water Operator. Each January, we offer training for those interested in positions in the wastewater fields. In addition, we have internship opportunities and courses providing CEUs for those already certified as operators.



For information, contact Ann Songayllo at 845-687-5012, songayla@sunyulster.edu, or visit a listing of courses found at: http://www.sunyulster.edu/continuing_education/environmental_health_safety.php. You can register by calling 845-339-2025 or online at http://www.sunyulster.edu/continuing_education/environmental_health_safety.php