

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**  
**Bureau of Clean Water**

**DOCUMENT NUMBER:** 385-2314-002

**TITLE:** Sewage Enforcement Officer Certification and Training Program  
Guidance

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** Upon publication of notice as final in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*

**AUTHORITY:** Section 10(9), (13) and (14) of the Pennsylvania Sewage Facilities Act (Act) (35 P.S. §750.10(9), (13) and (14)); 25 Pa. Code § 72.43(d), (j) and (k)

**POLICY:** The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will establish an Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO) certification and training program that includes prerequisite and continuing education training components and establishes the certification requirements for the SEO community.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this document is to establish the framework for an SEO certification and training program that will produce a knowledgeable and skilled SEO community to serve as the foundation of the on-lot sewage disposal program in Pennsylvania. The certification and training program includes specific requirements for SEO candidates who wish to become certified SEOs, for certified SEOs that need to maintain their certification and for lapsed or inactive SEOs that wish to reinstate their certification.

**APPLICABILITY:** This guidance applies to the DEP staff and persons seeking to become certified and persons already certified as SEOs.

**DISCLAIMER:** The policies and procedures outlined in this guidance document are intended to supplement existing requirements. Nothing in the policies or procedures shall affect regulatory requirements.

The policies and procedures herein are not an adjudication or a regulation. There is no intent on the part of the DEP to give these rules that weight or deference. This document establishes the framework within which the DEP will exercise its administrative discretion in the future. The DEP reserves the discretion to deviate from this policy statement if circumstances warrant.

**PAGE LENGTH:** 10 pages

## I. GENERAL

- A. This guidance establishes a framework for the DEP to manage its SEO training program and the SEO certification program with the goal of meeting the individual needs of the SEO community and to support the general needs of local agencies in the Commonwealth.
- B. To fulfill its SEO training responsibility, the DEP has developed an integrated training curriculum comprised of precertification and continuing education (CE) subject material. Successful completion of a precertification training curriculum is required prior to taking the SEO certification examination (exam) for the first time. Following certification, CE training is required to maintain an SEO's certification. All training is delivered through a combination of instructor led classroom training, self-study web-based training or eLearning, self-study correspondence training or distance education, webinars and customized individual training.
- C. The DEP may use department assets or resources to develop and deliver precertification training, CE training or contract with a third-party to provide these services.
- D. At the time of this publication, all training is being offered to SEO candidates and certified SEOs through DEP-approved third-party training sponsors and DEP-approved courses. A separate guidance document, *Act 537 Program Guidance; Training Provider Manual for the Pennsylvania Onlot Sewage System Training Program* (385-2314-001), details the methodology for application for, review and approval of third-party provider-based training sponsors and courses for precertification and CE training.
- E. Pennsylvania Clean Water Academy (PaCWA)

The DEP's Bureau of Clean Water has a learning management system entitled the Pennsylvania Clean Water Academy (PaCWA). The PaCWA will serve the SEO certification and training program. It will provide self-service for SEOs to find training courses, register for training courses, check on their training status, update their personal information and renew their certification. In addition, potential SEO candidates will be able to register for precertification courses and the certification examination to become an SEO. The PaCWA is located at <https://pacleanwateracademy.remote-learner.net/>.

- F. Statutory and Regulatory Authority
  - 1. The Act (35 P.S. §§ 750.1-750.20a) assigns certain responsibilities for sewage facilities planning and permitting to the local agencies. Local agencies are responsible for issuing permits for certain on-lot sewage systems, (35 P.S. § 750.7), and have the authority to prevent or restrain violations and abate nuisances under the Act (35 P.S. §§ 750.12-750.15). The powers and duties of local agencies related to permitting on-lot sewage systems are also set forth in regulations (25 Pa. Code § 72.42).
  - 2. Local agencies are required to employ an adequate number of SEOs to fulfill their sewage facilities permitting responsibilities (35 P.S. § 750.8(b); 25 Pa. Code § 72.42(a)(1)).

3. The DEP has the duty to establish a training program for SEOs, including minimum training requirements and curriculum for certification, and to require SEOs to participate in the training program (35 P.S. §§ 750.10(9), 750.10(13), 750.10(14); 25 Pa. Code § 72.43(d), (j) and (k)).
4. The DEP has the power and duty to revoke or suspend the certification of SEOs for cause, or to recommend reinstatement of the same (35 P.S. § 750.10(10); 25 Pa. Code § 72.43(e), (f), (g), (h) and (k)).
5. The State Board for the Certification of Sewage Enforcement Officers (the Board) is responsible for administering the SEO certification program and has the authority to hear appeals and issue adjudications on DEP actions to revoke or suspend an SEO's certification (35 P.S. § 750.11(b); 25 Pa. Code §§ 72.52 and 72.58).

G. Contact Information

This guidance, including all information relative to becoming and maintaining an SEO certification is posted on the DEP's website <http://www.dep.pa.gov/>. The DEP may also utilize other web-based technologies to disseminate information and manage the SEO certification process.

If you have questions related to this guidance, contact DEP at:

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
Bureau of Clean Water  
Division of Municipal Facilities  
P.O. Box 8774  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8774

Phone: 717-772-2186      Fax: 717-772-4474      E-mail: [RA-seotrng@pa.gov](mailto:RA-seotrng@pa.gov)

## II. **PRECERTIFICATION TRAINING**

A. Persons who desire to become a certified SEO must complete the following DEP-approved precertification training courses and successfully pass a written exam administered by the Board.

B. Soils Course

The first part of an SEO candidate's precertification training is a comprehensive DEP-approved soils course designed to teach the overarching principles of how soils relate to on-lot sewage treatment and disposal. At a minimum, the course will cover: concepts and terminology necessary to understand soil development, formation, classification, composition, and physical and chemical properties of soil as they relate to on-lot sewage treatment and disposal. An approved course can have multiple delivery methods but must be heavily weighted with hands-on instruction in the field. Emphasis will be placed on soil description and interpretation as they relate to identifying limiting zones in a three-

dimensional landscape. The course will include an examination that the candidate must pass. A candidate will be allowed to take the soils exam three (3) times. After the third failed attempt, the candidate must retake the soils course before taking the soils exam. If the candidate does not pass the soils exam on additional attempts, the same conditions apply. An SEO candidate must successfully complete this the soils course before attending the SEO Precertification Academy.

C. SEO Precertification Academy

The second part of an SEO candidate's precertification training is the "SEO Precertification Academy." This course is designed to provide the basic skills and knowledge a future SEO needs to know to work for a local agency and to prepare the SEO for permitting on-lot sewage disposal systems in a municipality.

This DEP-approved training course covers *25 Pa. Code* Chapters 71, 72 and 73. The training focuses on teaching the basic skills necessary for an individual to perform as an SEO. At a minimum, the training will cover: slope determination, isolation distances, soil probe evaluations, soil surveys, site evaluations, site testing, daily flow calculations, percolation testing, sewage system selection, building sewers, treatment tanks, distribution systems, absorption area construction, system installation, final system inspections, sewage facilities planning, administration and system malfunctions and repairs.

- D. Candidates who want to pursue SEO precertification training can access the PaCWA for a list of DEP-approved training courses per the contact information section of this guidance (*Section I.F.*). The candidate should follow the instructions in the PaCWA for course registration and schedule information. A candidate who successfully completes precertification training will receive a certificate of completion.

### III. SEO CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

- A. An SEO candidate must successfully complete all required DEP-approved precertification training courses before taking the SEO certification exam. Proof in the form of a certificate of completion is required.
- B. To sit for an SEO certification exam, a candidate must register for the exam by the due date posted on DEP's website. A candidate can register through the PaCWA or submit an application with the application fee to the Board.
- C. The Board Secretary will notify a candidate that the candidate has been admitted to the SEO certification exam and provide further information as necessary prior to the exam.
- D. A minimum of four (4) SEO certification exams are scheduled each year.
- E. The Board announces the location and time of each SEO certification exam in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* and on the SEO and the SEO Certification Board webpages on the DEP website at the beginning of each calendar year. The announcement includes registration information for the SEO certification exam.

- F. The SEO certification exam consists of 100 multiple choice questions prepared by the DEP and is comprised of four (4) categories: planning, administration, soils and technical. The SEO certification exam is open book and a candidate has a maximum of 3.5 hours to complete the exam.
- G. A passing grade for the SEO certification exam consists of five (5) scores. A candidate must achieve at least 50% in each of the four (4) specific categories listed above, and an overall average score of at least 70%.
- H. A candidate who passes the SEO certification exam and satisfies all eligibility requirements set forth in the regulations may be certified to perform the duties of an SEO by the Board. The Board certifies within 30 days of the exam date, by a majority vote, each eligible candidate who passed the exam. This vote occurs during the public meetings held by the Board. If the Board does not meet within the 30-day time-period after the SEO certification exam, a candidate who has passed the exam is deemed certified.
- I. A candidate who does not pass the SEO certification exam will be notified by the Board Secretary and informed of the future exam schedule.
- J. Upon the Board's action of certifying an eligible SEO candidate, the Board Secretary will provide a wall certificate with the SEO's individual certification number and date of certification and two certification pocket cards. The SEO's individual certification number and the date of expiration of the SEO's certification is listed on the pocket card. One pocket card is meant to be displayed with the certificate and the other pocket card should be carried by the SEO for identification purposes.
- K. A candidate may sit for the SEO certification exam three (3) times. After the third failed attempt the candidate must repeat the SEO Precertification Academy training course before taking the certification exam; the candidate does not need to repeat the Precertification Soils Course. If the candidate does not pass the SEO certification exam on additional attempts, the same conditions for repeating the Academy apply.

#### IV. SEO CONTINUING EDUCATION TRAINING

CE training is designed to provide the SEO with additional skills, knowledge and resources so that the SEO is better equipped to make decisions that ultimately protect Pennsylvania's public health and environment. An SEO must continue to acquire skills to provide the best available service to persons that are planning to install new systems, are installing new systems, or are repairing malfunctioning systems.

The following items highlight the SEO CE Program:

- A SEOs are required to complete 15 CE credits during each certification cycle.
- B For new SEOs, **effective January 1, 2019**, the certification cycle shall move to a two-year rolling cycle. For example, after the SEO Precertification Academy is complete and the exam is passed, SEOs will have two (2) years from the SEO's certification date to obtain 15 CE credits.

- C. Existing SEOs in the current two-year certification cycle that starts on July 1 and ends on June 30 will stay in this cycle unless the SEO enters lapsed status; nothing has changed. For example, a current SEO's certification cycle began on July 1, 2018 and will end on June 30, 2020.
- D. If an SEO is unable to obtain 15 CE credits within the SEO's two-year cycle, the SEO's certification will lapse. If the lapsed SEO can obtain enough credits to meet the 15 CE credit requirement and pays the renewal fee, the SEO will move to active status after completion of the renewal process within the PaCWA. The start of the new two-year cycle will begin on the date of achieving active status. For example, an SEO's certification lapsed on July 1, 2019; the SEO obtains the required credits, renews and pays their renewal fee on December 30, 2019. The SEO's two-year cycle for obtaining 15 CE credits is now December 30, 2019 to December 30, 2021.
- E. If a lapsed SEO is unable to obtain 15 CE credits within two (2) years after the lapse date, SEO's certification becomes inactive. To return to active status, the SEO must complete any DEP required precertification courses that the SEO has not taken previously. If the SEO previously attended the precertification courses, the SEO need not take the courses again, but must retake and pass the Precertification Soils Course and SEO Certification exams to show competency with the material.
- F. For certification cycles that ***end before June 30, 2020***, SEO's who earn more than 15 CE credits within a certification cycle may carry over up to (7) credits into the next cycle.
- G. Effective with certification cycles that ***end after June 30, 2020 and before June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022***, SEO's who earn more than 15 CE credits within a certification cycle may carry over up to (3) credits into the next cycle.
- H. Effective with certification cycles that ***end after June 30, 2022***, SEO's who earn more than 15 CE credits within a certification cycle will not be able to carry over any credits into the next cycle. For example, an SEO may complete as many CE courses as desired during a certification cycle. All courses taken are displayed on the SEO's training report for historical reference, but credits more than 15 will not be added into the "total credit count" on the report or carried over into the next cycle.
- I. The DEP may waive or adjust the amount of minimum CE credits when circumstances beyond the control of all participants warrant. In the event of this situation, the DEP would make an announcement to all active and lapsed SEOs and post the announcement on the DEP website as listed in the contact information of this guidance (*Section I.G.*). The DEP will make this announcement as early as possible.
- J. The DEP may designate certain CE courses as mandatory for certification renewal and may establish a specific "completion date" for such courses. The criteria for establishing mandatory course training is based on subject matter critical to public health and integral to SEO job performance; but may not be covered in sufficient detail during the precertification training.

1. If a mandatory course has a post-test, the SEO must achieve a passing score on the post-test to receive CE credit for the course. The date of course completion as noted on the SEO's training record report is the date in which the SEO passed the post-test.
  2. The DEP believes that a comprehensive soils course is fundamental for all SEOs and therefore is requiring every SEO to take and successfully complete a DEP-approved mandatory soils course. Effective immediately, any SEO that has not taken and successfully passed the previous mandatory course #109 *Advanced Soils* or an equivalent DEP approved soils course as stated in *Section II.A.*, must take a DEP approved soils course within five (5) years of the date this guidance becomes final. If an SEO fails to successfully complete a DEP approved soils course within five (5) years, the SEO's certification will become lapsed.
- K. CE credits are obtained after satisfactory completion of a DEP or a DEP-approved third-party classroom, correspondence or web-based training course.
- L. The same course content can be taught through different delivery modes. For example, a course can be taught in the classroom, as a web-based course, or by correspondence. Please note that an SEO can take one (1) of these course delivery options only once during a certification cycle for CE credit.
- M. For certain DEP on-lot alternate technologies, an SEO is required to complete a training course for that technology as a condition for issuing an on-lot sewage disposal system permit for that technology. If an SEO completes a technology course after having already satisfied the 15 CE credits, those CE credits will not roll-over into the next certification cycle, however the SEO would be delegated authority to review permits for systems using that technology upon completion of the course.
- N. An SEO may repeat a CE course within a certification cycle but will not receive credit for the course.
- O. An SEO who misses more than 30 minutes per day of a course will not receive CE credits for that course. Continued participation in the course is at the instructor's discretion.
- P. An SEO must present a valid government-issued photo ID during course registration for admittance during instructor led courses. An SEO may display the SEO's pocket card for supporting identification.
- Q. An SEO is responsible for all course registrations. An SEO must also ensure that the SEO has taken enough CE courses necessary to satisfy the SEO's certification training requirement.
- R. The Board Secretary will maintain an SEO training database within the PaCWA. Any potential discrepancies with an SEO's training record report should be directed to the Board Secretary.
- S. The Board Secretary posts an updated list of active SEOs on the DEP website after every certification exam. This public list includes contact information for all active SEOs such

as: their name, counties in which they work, addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers.

## V. **SEO CERTIFICATION STATUS AND REQUIREMENTS**

### A. SEO Certification Renewals

The Board Secretary, through the PaCWA, will provide reminders to all active SEOs to renew their certification two (2) months before their certification cycle ends. If an active SEO does not renew the SEO's certification by the end of the certification cycle or does not complete the requisite CE requirements, the SEO's certification will become lapsed. The failure to meet re-certification requirements for a lapsed SEO will result in the SEO's certification becoming inactive. A person cannot be employed as an SEO while in a lapsed or inactive status.

#### 1. Active SEO Certification Renewal

- a. Prior to renewing an SEO certification, the SEO must have acquired 15 CE credits within the SEO's certification cycle. An SEO should retain course completion certificates in case of conflict with DEP records.
- b. An SEO must renew on-line through the PaCWA or, submit the SEO certification renewal application to the Board Secretary with a renewal fee of \$50 by the end of the SEO's certification cycle.
- c. An SEO must be in compliance with the Act and the regulations implementing the Act.
- d. The Board Secretary verifies through the PaCWA, or otherwise processes all renewal applications, and issues new pocket cards to active SEOs. The pocket cards will have an expiration date for the SEO's new certification cycle and will be printable from the PaCWA.

#### 2. Lapsed SEO Certification Renewal

- a. An SEO whose certification lapses because the SEO did not acquire the requisite CE credits within the certification cycle will be placed in lapsed status and cannot be employed as an SEO. The SEO has two (2) years from the end of the cycle, in which SEO is lapsed, to satisfy the 15 CE credit requirement.
- b. After the SEO in lapsed status completes the required training, the SEO may apply to the Board Secretary, through the PaCWA, for renewal of the SEO certification.
- c. An SEO may also be placed in lapsed status because the SEO failed to renew through the PaCWA, or otherwise failed to submit the renewal application and/or renewal fee on time. The SEO has two (2) years from



the end of the cycle, in which the SEO is lapsed, to renew on-line and/or submit a renewal application/fee.

- d. The Board Secretary verifies through the PaCWA, processes renewal applications for SEOs that are in lapsed status, and issues new pocket cards to lapsed SEOs returning to active status. The pocket cards will have an expiration date for the SEO's new certification cycle, which will be two (2) years from the date the SEO regained active status.
- e. If an SEO does not complete the 15 CE credit requirement or renew through the PaCWA or submit a renewal application and renewal fee for the certification cycle in which the SEO is lapsed, the SEO's certification expires, and the SEO becomes inactive. An SEO in inactive status cannot renew the SEO's certification. An SEO wanting to regain active certification status must complete the certification reinstatement process (*Section V.B.*).

## B. SEO Certification Reinstatement

A previously certified SEO whose certification became inactive may seek to have the SEO certification reinstated.

### 1. Inactive SEO Certification Status

- a. A previously certified SEO whose certification became inactive must pass the Precertification Soils Course and SEO Certification exams to have the SEO certification reinstated. A previously certified SEO who wishes to take the Precertification Soils Course and SEO Certification exams should refer to *Section III* of this guidance.
- b. A previously certified SEO whose SEO certification is reinstated will be reassigned the SEO's original SEO certification number.
- c. A previously certified SEO may be required to take an additional training course(s) as a condition for reinstatement to active status.
- d. Previous delegation authority to review and approve alternate on-lot technologies may not carry over if the SEO's certification is reinstated to active status. The DEP will review the previously approved alternate on-lot technology courses completed by the SEO and determine if the SEO needs to complete the course again.

### 2. Suspended SEO Certification Status

- a. A previously certified SEO whose certification has been suspended and is seeking reinstatement must submit a written request for reinstatement to the DEP within two (2) years of the date of suspension, or otherwise follow the specific terms for reinstatement outlined in the DEP Order

suspending the SEO's certification, or any settlement agreement or Board decision due to an appeal of the DEP Order.

- b. The DEP may reinstate a suspended SEO certification under the following circumstances:
  - 1) The previously certified SEO has taken and passed the Precertification Soils Course and SEO Certification exams.
  - 2) The previously certified SEO has satisfactorily completed any special training program designed by the DEP to strengthen a specific weakness in the SEO's administration of the Act or regulations. The program may entail the use of testing procedures including, but not limited to, field evaluation of technical performance and written or oral examination of standards and procedures.
  - 3) The previously certified SEO has satisfactorily completed any requirement by the DEP for training under the direction of another certified SEO selected by the DEP for a period established by the DEP.
  - 4) The previously certified SEO whose certification has been suspended for more than two (2) years will have his/her certification revoked by DEP.

### 3. Revoked SEO Certification Status

- a. A previously certified SEO whose SEO certification has been revoked may submit a written request for reinstatement to the Board after two (2) years from the date of revocation.
- b. In determining the fitness of the previously certified SEO for reinstatement, the Board shall consider:
  - 1) The nature and gravity of the misconduct of the previously certified SEO which resulted in the revocation.
  - 2) The DEP may recommend reinstatement of a revoked SEO certification under the following circumstances:
    - a) The previously certified SEO has taken and passed the Precertification Soils Course and SEO Certification exams.
    - b) The previously certified SEO has satisfactorily completed any special training program designed by the DEP to strengthen a specific weakness in the SEO's administration of the Act or regulations. The program may entail the use of testing procedures including, but not limited to, field

evaluation of technical performance and written or oral examination of standards and procedures.

- c) The previously certified SEO has satisfactorily completed any requirement by the DEP for training under the direction of another certified SEO selected by the DEP for a period established by the DEP.