

MINUTES
South Carolina Environmental Certification Board
Board Meeting
November 7, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.
Synergy Business Park, Kingtree Building
110 Centerview Drive, Columbia, South Carolina
Midlands Conference Room

Call to Order

Chair Ken Rentiers called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Other members present included: Vice Chair Phillip Thompson-King, Ronald J. Swearingen, Douglas Kinard, Jason Fell, William Van Ward, and Joshua Castleberry.

Staff members present included: Johnnie L. Rose, Jr., Board Executive; Cleve Langdale, Program Coordinator; Molly Price, Program Director; Hardwick Stuart, Office of Advice Counsel; and Maurice Smith, Office of Investigations and Enforcement.

Also present: Sean Cary of Creel Court Reporting.

Statement of Public Notice

Public notice of this meeting was properly posted at the S.C. Board of Environmental Certification office, Synergy Business Park, Kingtree Building, and provided to all requesting persons, organizations, and news media in compliance with Section 30-4-80 of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act.

Members of the public who wish to observe may do so in person or by live streaming at:

<https://lr.sc.gov/env/videos.aspx>

Invocation

The invocation was given by Phillip Thompson-King.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Adoption of Agenda

MOTION: To adopt the agenda as presented.

Thompson-King/Castleberry/approved.

Introduction of Board Members and Staff

Board members and staff introduced themselves.

Approval of Excused Absences

MOTION: To excuse the absence of Ken Tuck.

Thompson-King/Kinard/approved.

Approval of Board and Committee Meeting Minutes

July 25, 2024 – Quarterly Board Meeting

September 9, 2024 – Exam Review Committee Meeting

September 20, 2024 – Special Called Board Meeting

MOTION: To amend the September 20, 2024 Board meeting minutes, reflecting Jason Fell abstained from the vote to return the examination passing score to 70% from 60%.
Fell/Castleberry/approved.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of prior meetings as amended.
Castleberry/Thompson-King/approved.

Board Chairman’s Remarks – J. Kenneth Rentiers, Chair

Chair Rentiers thanked the Board members and staff for their continued dedication and emphasized the importance of their work in maintaining certification standards that protect public health and safety.

Staff Reports

Board Executive’s Report – Johnnie L. Rose, Jr.

Mr. Rose reminded the board members to state their names before speaking and making motions, asked that media and licensee correspondences be directed to Board staff, and provided updates on upcoming newsletters focused on industry-related topics. He also presented the licensee breakdown report, showing the total amount of operators across the certification program. Financials were reported with a cash balance of \$570,501.96 as of September 30, 2024.

Office of Investigations and Enforcement (OIE) – Maurice Smith

Mr. Smith reported between January 1, 2024 and November 2024, OIE received 27 complaints. There are currently 2 open cases and 21 closed cases.

Investigative Review Conference (IRC) Report – Maurice Smith

Mr. Smith reported there are 2 formal complaints and 1 case for dismissal.

MOTION: To accept the IRC report.
Kinard/Thompson/King/approved.

Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) Report – Chris Elliott

Mr. Elliot reported between January 1, 2024 and November 2024, ODC has 2 open cases and 2 closed cases.

Application Hearings:

Clark, Grant – EPC/EBL

Mr. Clark appeared before the Board for an application hearing. He was not represented by counsel. All persons testifying were sworn in by court reporter. Application hearings are recorded by a certified court reporter in the event a verbatim transcript is necessary.

Day, Leann – EWD

Ms. Day appeared before the Board for an application hearing. She was not represented by counsel. All persons testifying were sworn in by court reporter. Application hearings are recorded by a certified court reporter in the event a verbatim transcript is necessary.

MOTION: To enter executive session for legal advice.
Castleberry/Thompson-King/approved.

MOTION: To exit executive session. No actions were taken during executive session.
Castleberry/Thompson-King/approved.

MOTION: To approve Grant Clark's trainee application as a Physical/Chemical Wastewater Treatment Operator.

Van Ward/Thompson-King/approved.

MOTION: To approve Leann Day's A-level Well Driller's Experience Verification form based on her experience and educational background.

Swearingen/Thompson-King/approved.

Old Business

Review and Discussion: Pass Rates for WPI Standardized Exams

The board reviewed WPI exam pass rates, noting concerns about declining rates and the impact of repeat attempts on overall statistics. Mrs. Price highlighted that repeated, poorly prepared attempts were lowering cumulative pass rates and suggested mandatory training after a set number of failed attempts to improve preparation and uphold certification standards. She also presented data showing that education influenced pass rates, however, underprepared repeat attempts remained a key issue. Mr. Castleberry proposed a structured symposium with stakeholders to centralize discussions, and the Board explored practices from other states, including limiting attempts and adding training requirements. Members expressed interest in developing a South Carolina-specific certification exam to better align with state standards, though this would require significant investment and further feasibility assessment.

New Business

Approval of Exam Survey Questions

Ms. Price reviewed proposed survey questions aimed at collecting feedback from licensees about the exam process, preparation resources, and clarity of content. The board agreed that the survey results would provide valuable input for potential exam updates and preparation guidelines.

MOTION: To approve the Exam Survey Questions.

Thompson-King/Swearingen/approved.

Request for Clarification Regarding Computer Science Classes for Actual Operator Experience: Regulation 51-3(B)

Mr. Rose raised questions regarding the applicability of computer science courses as part of the actual operator experience requirement outlined in Regulation 51-3(B). The board discussed whether computer science courses provided relevant skills for operational tasks and if they should qualify.

MOTION: Delegate to staff to make the determination using their standard litmus test as to whether computer science classes can be counted towards licensure experience.

Castleberry/Fell/approved.

Virtual Registration Cards for Annual Renewals

Mr. Rose presented the idea of moving from physical registration cards to virtual cards as part of the board's annual renewals. The Licensee Lookout option on our website provides real-time updates, making it easier for licensees and enforcement personnel to verify credentials. The Board requested that DOTS be consulted to see if an option to receive a paper license could be built into the renewal system. This item will be presented at the next quarterly meeting of the Board.

Travel Approval for 2025 WPI Conference – LIC25

MOTION: To approve travel for four individuals to the 2025 WPI Conference in New Orleans.

Thompson-King/Kinard/approved.

Public Comments

John Young expressed gratitude for the ongoing efforts on exam standards and provided an announcement on behalf of the Department of Corrections. He requested that any surplus textbooks, particularly those related to water and wastewater, be donated to aid in training operators at correctional facilities. Young highlighted several success stories of former inmates who found employment post-training and emphasized the importance of flexibility in certification course criteria. He encouraged the board to adopt a more inclusive approach to course acceptance, such as considering courses like communication, industrial safety, and English composition, which he believes benefit certification efforts by enhancing necessary skills in the field.

Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn at 1:09 p.m.

Thompson-King/Castleberry/approved.