



WEAT ▪ 1825 Fortview Road Suite 102 ▪ Austin, Texas 78704 ▪ www.weat.org

Testimony to House Committee on Government Reform and Efficiency
HB 965
March 17, 2011

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members:

My name is Carol Batterton and I am the Executive Director of the Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT). We are a non-profit technical and educational organization whose members include scientists, engineers, utility managers, operators, and regulators. Collectively, our members are responsible for the design, operation and maintenance of wastewater collection and treatment systems all across Texas. We are a state member association of the Water Environment Federation. I have with me today Mr. Curtis Smalley and Ms. Dana White, both licensed wastewater operators, to serve as resource witnesses if you have any questions for them.

We are here today in support of HB 965.

With the current economic stresses facing Texas municipalities and other water and wastewater treatment providers, licensed water and wastewater operators are facing more and more travel restrictions for training. We believe that it is important for water and wastewater operators to have the option to use webinars for licensing renewal credit. Webinars offer the operators a means to get up to the minute training and information without the expense of travel. HB 965 will allow operators the flexibility to use webinars for renewal credit.

Webinar is short for web-based seminar which is a presentation, lecture, workshop or seminar that is transmitted over the internet. Webinars are interactive and can include polling and question and answer sessions to allow full participation between the audience and the presenter. The duration is usually one or two hours at most, and it is similar in format to conferences, seminars, and association meetings, which are primarily used for renewal credit today. The advantage of the webinar format is that the participant does not have to leave his/her office, thus saving travel resources and time away from the office.

In the past, TCEQ has had concerns about approving webinars for renewal credit due to issues related to monitoring attendance. However, most webinar software used today will (a) confirm registration; (b) confirm attendance; (c) show "inactivity" in the event an operator becomes distracted or works on other documents or browses the web, and (d) document who asked questions and was interactive.

Although monitoring of webinar participants is technologically feasible, we would point out that webinars can have hundreds of participants paying a nominal fee, and a manual review of such data by the training provider may not be practical for a one or two hour webinar. In addition, there may be multiple persons viewing a webinar at one location which further complicate attendance monitoring.

We believe that it is not necessary to rely on this electronic policing of operators. It is more important to recognize the operator as a professional who can be held to a high standard and trusted to report his/her own training accurately. It is also important to note that the operator who signs up to attend a webinar generally does so because of a specific, job-related need for the information provided, not just for the renewal hours. As such, he is more likely to be attentive to the presentation and take away usable information.

WEAT members include many licensed operators who hold A and B level licenses. Because of their many years in the industry, these A and B operators are generally high level managers and supervisors in their respective utilities or organizations. Most are in supervisory and/or higher level decision making positions and are respected professionals in the drinking water and water environment field.

For those A and B operators who by their very tenure and position in the industry have proven themselves worthy of trust and recognition as professionals, we think it is appropriate to permit them the opportunity to receive their continuing education through approved courses online and with a self-reporting mechanism much like other professionals in Texas, including licensed engineers, attorneys, and pharmacists among others. Many of the operators at this level of license are professionals in management at their facility who are working side by side with other professionals who are allowed to self-report.

We would also like to point out that producing webinars is not a significant income generating activity for WEAT. Most of the webinars we do are very low cost or even free to participants. We offer webinars as a service to our members.

We understand that there has been some concern about the possibility that this bill will open the door to some “fly by night” internet training providers, but we note that HB 965 continues to require TCEQ to review and approve content of any training provided for operator licensing just as they do now.

The current shortage of qualified operators in our state is a problem that will only get larger unless effort is made to treat operators as professionals that they are and allow them to address their ongoing training requirements in the same manner as other professionals.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol Batterton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carol Batterton, Executive Director
carol@weat.org