

Water Treatment Operator

Make a town's tap water safe and clean its wastewater. A municipal job with a pension, entered with a high school diploma.

TYPICAL PAY

\$75,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$52k to \$100k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Water treatment plants,
wastewater plants, pumping stati...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Required for a certificate in every province. Chemistry, biology and math help most.
- 2 Optional college program** 0 to 2 years
Water quality, environmental or chemical technician diplomas at colleges across Canada. Not required, but it helps you get hired and counts toward higher classes.
- 3 Operator-in-training** Weeks to months
In Ontario, pass the operator-in-training exam (70% to pass) and get hired at a plant. The certificate lasts 36 months. Alberta's entry levels are Small Systems and Level I.
- 4 Class I certificate** 1 year
After at least one year working in a municipal system, write the Class I exam. Alberta's Level I also needs a year of experience plus a training course.
- 5 Classes II, III and IV** 2 to 8 more years
Each class needs more years of experience and, for the top classes, post-secondary education or approved equivalents. Bigger plants need higher-class operators.

Pros and cons

- + Public-sector pension and job security
- + Entry with a high school diploma and one exam
- + Real public health impact, every glass of water
- On-call weeks and callouts at 3am
- Wastewater plants smell, and you get used to it
- Ongoing exams and mandatory training for your whole career

Good to know

Walkerton changed the rules

In 2000, contaminated drinking water in Walkerton, Ontario killed seven people and made thousands sick. The inquiry found the operators were untrained, and Ontario responded with the strict cert...

The exam is pass or wait

Ontario requires 70% to pass an operator exam. Alberta makes you wait at least three months between passing one level and writing the next.

Optional boosts

Higher classes. Both water and wastewater. Distribution and collection. Overall responsible operator.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Water treatment operators, wages (updated Nov 2025)
Government of Ontario: drinking water operator certification
OWWCO (Ontario Water Wastewater Certification Office)
Government of Alberta: water and wastewater operator certification

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/water-treatment-operator>



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