

# Sen. Cowles: Streamlining exam Administration for Wisconsin's environmental professionals

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after review of Clearinghouse Rule CR 21-068 expired in the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, which is chaired by Senator Cowles. This proposed permanent administrative rule allows for the third-party online administration of certifications and licenses for Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulated professions:

*“The pandemic posed many unknown challenges. Out of these challenges came the need for innovation, and some of these changes have earned the right to be utilized well beyond COVID-19. A keen example came after a temporary suspension of in-person certification and license examinations that are necessary for the operation of public and private water and waste management facilities and infrastructure throughout the state. While a temporary waiving of certain requirements provided some initial relief, the need for a longer-term solution was evident as the normal absences, retirements, and turnover was exacerbated by quarantines from ill or potentially-exposed workers and the overall workforce shortages that continues afflicting all sectors.*

*“I heard these concerns first-hand in 2020 from one of my local water utility directors who both saw and heard of the impacts on operators from a low number of available persons with credentials, causing potential noncompliance or violations and delaying service. I was not the first to pass these concerns along to the DNR,*

*and fortunately a solution was already in the works. Shortly after, the DNR reinstated socially-distanced in-person certification and license exams and set-up a process to meet more urgent needs. **The emergency rule in place now and the permanent rule that just passed through my Committee is the next step in a process to ensure that applicants for certifications and licenses today and in the future have an online option to ensure distance, time, or capacity limits are not a concern for professionals looking to join these pivotal industries.***

*“I want to applaud the DNR for their work to adapt to the changing circumstances and continue on that success to ensure our landfills, water and wastewater system, and septage and well water professions are available to continue providing us with the services necessary to maintain community safety, our convenience, our economy, and our standard of living. I also want to thank the Wisconsin Rural Water Association for providing the space necessary for in-person exams during the pandemic. I look forward to this permanent rule becoming effective.”*

[Clearinghouse Rule CR 21-068](#) allows for the DNR to contract with third-party administrators to offer online exams for landfill personnel, drinking water and wastewater system operators, septage haulers, and well drillers and pump installers. According to the DNR, in-person exams will continue to be offered for persons who need this option, but the online option will save time as applicants do not need to wait for the next in-person exam date and will save the expense and inconvenience of driving to an in-person exam location. CR 21-068 now heads to the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules for 30-days before it may become law.