

How to become a Water Operator

Water operators are vital for treating and transporting drinking water to homes and businesses.

This document shares a small amount of basic knowledge in the water operator field. Its purpose is to let people know it's an available avenue in their future professional careers.

For more information, please visit the American Water Works Association website through this QR code or talk to a local professional at Sun Prairie Utilities - call (608) 837 - 5500.



What's it like to be a water operator?

Generally, the water operators at Sun Prairie Utilities assist in operating, regulating, and maintaining the locally-owned utility and its several wells, aquifers, and reservoirs.

They also perform construction, repair, and maintenance-related work for the municipal water distribution system in the City of Sun Prairie.

The American Water Works Association reports that "jobs within the water industry remain relatively less affected by changes in the economy than other industries."

Additionally, water operators focus on working safely around the treatment and management of clean drinking water.

Water operators could be called at any hour to restore water service after accidents or water main breaks. These special calls can require long hours of overtime, even on the weekends. Water operators take pride in their craft and work hard to provide clean water to their communities.

How much \$\$ does a water operator make?

Although varying by municipality, the median competitive annual salary for a Sun Prairie Utilities water operator in 2026 is **\$80,558**.



What do Sun Prairie Utilities' water operators do?

A water operator's job changes constantly. Work locations and tasks are affected by the weather, emergencies, or time-sensitive projects. Some of the functions include:

- Operate and monitor equipment and processes used in treating raw water to remove impurities, contaminants, and pathogens.
- Conduct regular testing to ensure the water meets regulatory standards and is safe for consumption.
- Perform regular maintenance and repairs on water treatment and distribution equipment.
- Respond to emergencies, such as water main breaks, contamination incidents, or equipment failures.
- Maintain accurate data-keeping of water quality, maintenance activities, and other relevant information.
- Operate backhoes, dump trucks, and cranes to maintain the distribution system.
- Test, repair, replace, and install water meters.
- Flush water mains and hydrants, and enter/update flow test data for mapping system.

How can you become a water operator?

There are several ways to become a water operator. Two distinct routes include advancement opportunities at a utility or course certification.

If you choose to advance through a utility, the first step is to apply for an entry-level position (e.g., Grounds Maintenance). Explain to your employer that you want to become a water operator and are willing to learn when the opportunity arises. As positions shift, you can work your way up and eventually become a certified water operator.

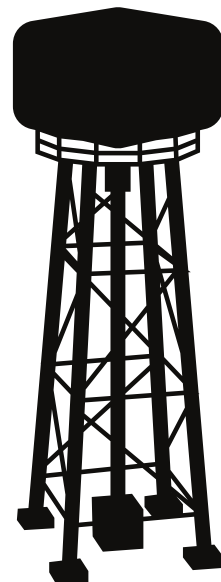
The most common path to becoming a water operator is taking a certification course. Education and certification requirements for water operators will vary by state, but most requirements fall under the following categories:

Entry Level Water Operators

- Typically requires a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Involves on-the-job training and basic knowledge of water treatment and distribution processes.
- Entry-level operators often work under the supervision of more experienced operators.

Higher Level Water Operators

- Obtaining higher levels of Water Operator certification is possible through continued education, examinations, and on-the-job experience.
- Certification requirements vary by location and are dictated at the state/local level as well as environmental agencies.



Certification tests cover chemistry, disinfection, biology, hydraulics, treatment techniques, measurement, and math.

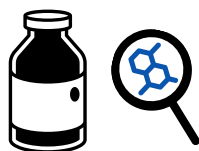
American Water Works Association provides training and educational courses every year. Sun Prairie High School students are encouraged to apply for the Sun Prairie Utilities WPPI Energy Scholarship during their senior year.

What do you need for the job?

Employers are looking for both women and men who have these during a water operator interview:

- Valid WI driver's license - class A.
- High school diploma, GED, or equivalent.
- Knowledge of First Aid and CPR.
- WI DNR certifications in groundwater and distribution.
- Able to comprehend and follow written instructions, maps, and diagrams related to the maintenance and repair of the water distribution system.
- Experience in mechanical maintenance, preferably related to water distribution systems and meter repair.
- Able to analyze technical procedures, perform utility-related calculations, and showcase critical thinking.
- Willingness to work in all types of weather conditions.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to utility safety practices and standards.

*Note: Some employers test for physical ability, such as balance, coordination, strength, and mechanical aptitude.



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