SMALL WATER SYSTEM OPERATOR CERTIFICATION PRACTICE EXAM (SAMPLE)

STUDY GUIDE

SAMPLE STUDY GUIDE WITH LIMITED QUESTIONS

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,
- Improve accuracy and speed,
- Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and
- Approach the exam with greater confidence.

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here's how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 – 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don't just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning. Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There's no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly, adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

1. Name the two processes used for softening water.

A. Lime softening & Ion exchange

B. Filtration & Coagulation

C. Chlorination & Fluoridation

D. Boiling & Distillation

2. Who is responsible for obtaining plan approvals from the DNR for major water system changes?

A. Water system operators

B. Municipal clerks

C. Private developers

D. Environmental health specialists

3. Which parameter is chemical characteristics affecting water quality?

A. pH

B. Temperature

C. Turbidity

D. Color

4. Why is source water protection important for a small water system?

A. It reduces the risk of contaminant intrusion at intakes, protects water quality, lowers treatment costs, and helps ensure safe drinking water from the source

B. It has no impact on system performance

C. It only affects color of water

D. It increases treatment complexity and cost with no benefit

5. Follow-up action for ALE?

A. Post signage about boil water advisory

B. Cease all sampling activities

C. Increase chlorine dosage only

D. Complete DNR Corrosion Control Treatment Recommendation Packet

6. DBP testing monitors primarily for which two parameters?

A. Chlorine residual and pH

B. Turbidity and color

C. Trihalomethanes (TTHMs) and five haloacetic acids (HAA5)

D. Nitrates and nitrites

7. Which term describes the water level in a well after pumps have run?

A. Static water level

B. Cone of depression

C. Drawdown

D. Pumping water level

8. Under the Lead and Copper Rule, which percentile triggers action?

A. 50th percentile

B. 99th percentile

C. 90th percentile

D. 95th percentile

9. What information should be included in emergency plan about local regulatory contact?

A. Fire department address

B. Local DNR representatives contact info

C. Federal agencies contact numbers

D. Local library contact

10. Which of the following is an example of a consolidated formation?

A. Sandstone

B. Glacial Till

C. Unconsolidated formation

D. Loose Sand

Answers

1. A
2. A
3. A
4. A
5. D
6. C
7. D
8. C
9. B
10. A

Explanations

1. Name the two processes used for softening water.

A. Lime softening & Ion exchange

B. Filtration & Coagulation

C. Chlorination & Fluoridation

D. Boiling & Distillation

Removing hardness means taking out calcium and magnesium ions that make water "hard." The two standard methods used to soften water in treatment plants are lime softening and ion exchange. Lime softening works by adding lime (calcium hydroxide) to raise the water's pH. As the pH climbs, calcium and magnesium precipitate out as calcium carbonate and magnesium hydroxide. These solids are then settled and filtered from the water. This approach is especially effective for high levels of hardness and can also reduce certain alkalinity issues, though it may require downstream pH adjustment. The process produces sludge that must be handled and disposed of. Ion exchange passes water through a bed of resin that exchanges calcium and magnesium ions in the water for sodium ions on the resin. The result is softened water, but the resin eventually becomes exhausted and must be regenerated with a brine solution to restore its capacity. Other common treatment steps address different problems: filtration and coagulation target particulates and color, not hardness; disinfection steps like chlorination and fluoridation manage pathogens and corrosion control; boiling or distillation can reduce minerals but are impractical for large-scale water treatment.

2. Who is responsible for obtaining plan approvals from the DNR for major water system changes?

A. Water system operators

B. Municipal clerks

C. Private developers

D. Environmental health specialists

Major changes to a public water system are regulated steps that must be approved before work begins, and the water system operator is the one charged with obtaining plan approvals from the Department of Natural Resources. Operators oversee the system's design and operation, coordinate with engineers, and submit the formal plan package to DNR for review to ensure the proposed changes meet safety, water quality, and capacity standards. This process protects public health by confirming that any modifications won't compromise the system's reliability. Municipal clerks handle administrative duties and records, not technical plan approvals. Private developers may initiate or fund projects, but if the system's operation is on the operator's or municipality's side, the actual responsibility to secure regulatory approval rests with the water system operator. Environmental health specialists regulate and inspect for compliance, but they don't submit plan approvals to DNR.

3. Which parameter is chemical characteristics affecting water quality?

A. pH

B. Temperature

C. Turbidity

D. Color

pH reflects the chemical nature of water by measuring hydrogen ion activity, which tells you how acidic or basic the water is. This directly governs chemical reactions in the water, such as how metals dissolve or precipitate, how buffering and alkalinity behave, and how effective disinfectants like chlorine are. Because it quantifies chemical reactivity and composition, pH best represents chemical characteristics affecting water quality. Temperature is a physical factor that influences reaction rates but does not describe the water's chemical makeup. Turbidity is about suspended solids and how clear the water is, a physical property of the water. Color describes the visual appearance caused by dissolved or suspended substances and can hint at composition, but it's not a direct chemical characteristic in the same way pH is.

4. Why is source water protection important for a small water system?

A. It reduces the risk of contaminant intrusion at intakes, protects water quality, lowers treatment costs, and helps ensure safe drinking water from the source

B. It has no impact on system performance

C. It only affects color of water

D. It increases treatment complexity and cost with no benefit

Protecting source water is important because the water entering the system starts at the source, and what happens in the watershed directly affects quality and treatment needs. If contaminants reach the intake, the treatment plant must work harder to remove them, which can raise costs, complicate operations, and risk safe water if a contamination event occurs. By safeguarding the area around the intake—reducing runoff, spills, and other contamination pathways—you keep the contaminant load low from the start. That means the water going into the treatment process is cleaner, treatment can be more efficient, chemical use can be reduced, and the system is less prone to costly problems or outages. For a small system, where treatment capacity and budgets are limited, protecting source water helps ensure safer drinking water and more reliable, affordable operation.

5. Follow-up action for ALE?

A. Post signage about boil water advisory

B. Cease all sampling activities

C. Increase chlorine dosage only

D. Complete DNR Corrosion Control Treatment Recommendation Packet

When a system has an action level exceedance for lead and copper, the focus is on evaluating and implementing corrosion control measures. The best next step is to complete the DNR Corrosion Control Treatment Recommendation Packet. This formal process brings regulatory guidance into play and helps determine what treatment changes are needed (such as adjusting pH/alkalinity, adding corrosion inhibitors, or other options) and how to monitor effectiveness. Signing signage for a boil-water advisory isn't appropriate here, since that relates to microbiological contamination; ceasing sampling would violate regulatory requirements; simply increasing chlorine dose doesn't address the underlying lead corrosion issues. The corrosion control treatment recommendation packet provides a structured path to reduce lead and copper release and bring levels back into compliance.

6. DBP testing monitors primarily for which two parameters?

A. Chlorine residual and pH

B. Turbidity and color

C. Trihalomethanes (TTHMs) and five haloacetic acids (HAA5)

D. Nitrates and nitrites

Disinfectant by-product testing targets the compounds that form when a disinfectant like chlorine reacts with natural organic matter in water. The two main DBP groups routinely monitored are the total trihalomethanes (TTHMs) and the five haloacetic acids (HAA5). TTHMs comprise several chlorinated and brominated compounds, such as chloroform and others like bromodichloromethane, dibromochloromethane, and bromoform. HAA5 includes five haloacetic acids: monochloroacetic acid, dichloroacetic acid, trichloroacetic acid, dibromoacetic acid, and bromochloroacetic acid. These two groups are specifically regulated because they are the most common DBPs formed during chlorination and have associated health concerns over long-term exposure. Other parameters like chlorine residual and pH relate to disinfection control, while turbidity, color, and nitrates/nitrites pertain to other water quality aspects, not the primary focus of DBP testing.

7. Which term describes the water level in a well after pumps have run?

A. Static water level

B. Cone of depression

C. Drawdown

D. Pumping water level

When water is pumped from a well, the water surface drops from its undisturbed level. The term that describes the actual water surface in the well while pumping (or at the end of pumping) is the pumping water level. This reflects the head available while the pump is drawing water. The difference between the static water level (the level with no pumping) and this pumping level is called drawdown. The static level is the level before pumping starts, and the cone of depression refers to the surrounding aquifer's lowered groundwater due to pumping, not the water surface inside the well itself. So the water level in the well after pumping runs is best described as the pumping water level.

8. Under the Lead and Copper Rule, which percentile triggers action?

A. 50th percentile

B. 99th percentile

C. 90th percentile

D. 95th percentile

Under the Lead and Copper Rule, action is triggered when the 90th percentile of sample results exceeds the action level. This means you rank all sample results from lowest to highest and find the value that is higher than 90% of the samples. If that 90th percentile value is above the action level (lead 15 ppb; copper 1.3 mg/L), the utility must take specified actions, such as optimizing corrosion control, notifying the public, and implementing other required measures. The 90th percentile is used because it focuses on high-end readings while not overreacting to a few extreme samples, unlike higher percentiles (which would flag too few samples) or the median (which would ignore high results).

9. What information should be included in emergency plan about local regulatory contact?

A. Fire department address

B. Local DNR representatives contact info

C. Federal agencies contact numbers

D. Local library contact

In emergencies, you need a direct line to the regulator who oversees your water system. The local Department of Natural Resources representative is that person because regulators handle reporting requirements, permits, and compliance actions for the facility. The plan should include the regulator's contact information—agency name, the representative's name and title, after-hours phone, office phone, and email. Having this ready ensures you can promptly report events, obtain guidance, and meet regulatory obligations without delay. Other options don't fit as the primary regulatory contact. The fire department is an emergency response agency, not the regulatory authority responsible for oversight and reporting. Federal agency numbers may be relevant in certain national-level incidents, but the emergency plan should point to the local regulator for day-to-day regulatory communication. The local library is not related to regulatory oversight or reporting requirements.

10. Which of the following is an example of a consolidated formation?

A. Sandstone

B. Glacial Till

C. Unconsolidated formation

D. Loose Sand

Consolidated formations are solid rocks formed when loose sediments are lithified—compacted and cemented together by minerals to become a cohesive rock. Sandstone fits this description because it starts as sand grains that settle and, over time, are compacted and cemented with minerals like silica or calcite, creating a durable, rock-like material. In contrast, glacial till is typically loose, unsorted material deposited by a glacier and not bonded into a solid rock; it's considered an unconsolidated sediment. Likewise, an unconsolidated formation and loose sand describe materials that have not undergone lithification, so they aren't consolidated.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

https://smallwatersystemop.examzify.com

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!