

# Certified Installer Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems - COWTS Credentialing Handbook



## Guide to Policies and Procedures for COWTS Credentialing Program

Iowa Onsite Waste Water Association (IOWWA)

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# ***IOWWA’S Mission is “to advance the environmental health and protection professional for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all.”***

In pursuit of its mission, IOWWA sponsors a credentialing program: the Certified Installer Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (CIOWTS) – Basic and Advanced Levels.

Congratulations on taking a step towards becoming credentialed. Holding a credential benefits not only you as an individual in proving your competency and capability in the field of onsite installation, but also benefits the community and employers. It is through the device of a credential that a community gains assurance that the workforce handling this responsibility is competent, properly trained, and equipped to carry out their responsibilities. The credential serves to verify that a professional has achieved what is perceived as a baseline level of competence. By having credentialed people on their staff, employers are assured of having a workforce of employees that are reasonably capable of handling whatever challenges their job responsibilities and their employer present.

## **Description of CIOWTS Credential**

Certified Installer Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (CIOWTS) Basic and Advanced Levels.

The CIOWTS credential is designed to test the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the successful installation of an onsite wastewater treatment system. Since it is a national credential, and state and local codes are not covered, this credential is meant to enhance a state or local regulatory program.

IOWWA members/associate members who have successfully passed the CIOWTS exam will automatically receive IOWWA Board Certified Installer status.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Definition of Holding a CIOWTS Credential

IOWWA has adopted the following definition of being credentialed:

Credentialing is a process by which a non-government agency validates, based upon predetermined standards, an individual's qualifications and knowledge for practice in onsite waste water system installations.

CIOWTS credentials, nationally recognized in scope, validates your specialized knowledge and experience, thus promoting the practice of onsite installation. Credentialed individuals are viewed as leader, mentors, and role models in onsite of waste water installation systems. Studying for and maintaining a CIOWTS credential keeps you up to date on the latest developments in this specialty and demonstrates your commitment to life-long learning.

### Sponsorship/Administration

The credentialing program has been developed by the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). The Iowa Onsite Wastewater Association (IOWWA) contracts with NEHA to offer the CIOWTS credential. Professional Testing, Inc. (PTI) offers the CIOWTS at various testing sites around the country and throughout Iowa. The CIOWTS exam is also offered on computer through Pearson VUE testing centers. Pearson VUE has over 1,000 locations nationwide.

### Membership Requirements

Membership in any association or organization, including IOWWA, is **NOT** required to participate in the CIOWTS credentialing program.

### Non-Discrimination Policy

It is the policy of IOWWA that no individual shall be excluded from the opportunity to participate in the IOWWA credentialing program on the basis of ethnic origin, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability.

### Name/Address Change

It is your responsibility to notify IOWWA, in writing or via fax or email of any change in your name and/or address. Without this information IOWWA is unable to send you important information on testing and maintaining your credential.

### Contacting IOWWA –

The IOWWA office may be contacted by writing, faxing, calling or emailing:

IOWWA, C/o Alice Vinsand Inc., Executive Director

10927 Lincoln, Des Moines IA 50325

Ph: 515-225-1051 Fax: 515-225-8187

Email: [Shirley@avinsandinc.com](mailto:Shirley@avinsandinc.com) or [alice@avinsandinc.com](mailto:alice@avinsandinc.com)

Web: [www.iowwa.com](http://www.iowwa.com)

# Credentialing Exam and Application Procedures

## Examination Standards

IOWWA is committed to offering fair, valid and reliable credentialing examinations. A **fair** examination is not biased for or against any groups because of ethnic background, geographic locale or any other demographic criterion. A **valid** examination accurately reflects the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for competent practice. All questions appearing on the examinations have been validated using accepted psychometric practices. **Reliability** means the examination is consistent in its measurements of the knowledge, skills and abilities of competent practice. Each examination question is evaluated on a regular basis for reliability, fairness, and validity. Each examination question has been verified for accuracy and reliability and referenced to a published source.

## Application Procedures

Applicants applying for the CIOWTS credential must complete the *Application for Certified Installer Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems*. This application can be downloaded from IOWWA's website at: [www.iowwa.com](http://www.iowwa.com).

Eligibility to sit for the CIOWTS credentialing examination is determined by IOWWA. Please review eligibility requirements for the CIOWTS examination by reviewing the appropriate candidate information available on our website at [www.iowwa.com](http://www.iowwa.com). To have a candidate information brochure and application sent to you please contact IOWWA at:

IOWWA

C/o Alice Vinsand, Inc.

10927 Lincoln, Des Moines IA

(515) 225-1051 / Fax: 480-802-6643

Email: [alice@avinsandinc.com](mailto:alice@avinsandinc.com)

Once your completed application is received by IOWWA, the review process may take up to approximately 6 weeks. You will receive notification from IOWWA once the review process is complete in the form of an admission letter (scheduled paper and pencil administration), an incomplete letter (stating your application is incomplete with reasons listed), or a denial letter (indicating you are not eligible to take the exam with explanation). For those who choose to take the test on computer at a Pearson VUE testing center, *a valid email address is required*.

## Fees

All application and examination fees are detailed on the CIOWTS application. IOWWA members are eligible for reduced application and examination fees. You can become a member of IOWWA at the same time you are applying for a credential and be eligible for the reduced fees. IOWWA membership is not required to take the CIOWTS test.

## **Examination Procedures**

Exam Security - The CIOWTS examinations are the exclusive property of NEHA. Candidates who take the CIOWTS examination acknowledge that they understand the following:

1. Federal copyright law protects the examination and questions contained therein. No part of the examination may be copied or reproduced in part or whole by any means whatsoever, including memorization.
2. The theft or attempted theft of an examination booklet is punishable as a felony.
3. Candidate participation in any irregularity occurring during the examination such as giving or obtaining unauthorized information or aid, as evidenced by observation or subsequent statistical analysis, may be sufficient cause to terminate the candidate's participation, invalidate the results of the candidate's examination, or take other appropriate action deemed necessary.

### Examination Scheduling/Rescheduling/Cancellation Fees

IOWWA will process and hold the credential for individuals who test through IOWWA after January 1, 2011 and all subsequent renewals will be processed through IOWWA.

When scheduling a paper and pencil examination, failure to show up at the scheduled time and location may result in the forfeiture of all examination fees. When scheduling an examination through Pearson VUE be sure the date you choose will work. A \$20.00 cancellation/reschedule fee applies to all cancelled or rescheduled examination appointments. Please schedule your examination online through the Pearson VUE website at [www.pearsonvue.com/neha](http://www.pearsonvue.com/neha). An additional fee of \$10.00 will apply if scheduling by phone.

### Examination Results

Examination results are reported directly to IOWWA. IOWWA, in turn, will notify you of your results. IOWWA, NEHA nor our test vendor will release examination results over the telephone, via fax, or email. You will also receive a strength/weakness report detailing the examination performance as percent scores in the areas of Exam Score Percent and Exam Score Raw as well as a breakdown of percent scores for diagnostic information (plan assessment, job staging and site development/installation).

### Credentialing Packets

Credentialing packets are mailed to individuals that pass the exam. The credentialing packet includes your notification of examination results, wall certificate, wallet card, IOWWA Code of Ethics, and continuing education information.

### Re-test Process:

1. Applicant is notified by letter following the test explaining that they failed and include a CIOWTS Application Retake form. The letter will include the next IOWWA testing date and location (if available) and also information to take the computer test through PearsonVUE. To re-take the examination the Exam Retake Fee (same as original test fee) must be paid to cover the cost of the fee paid to Professional Testing, Inc. (PTI).

2. Applicants must wait at least 90 days before retaking an exam, though there are certain circumstances where we can waive that waiting period if approved by the education committee.
3. The applicant can attend the Installation Overview again however full registration fees must be submitted.
4. IOWWA does NOT have a limit on the number of times someone can take an exam.

## **Credentialing Period and Continuing Education**

Credential Cycle - The CIOWTS runs on a two-year cycle. For those receiving the CIOWTS credential with IOWWA *after* January 1, 2011 the first day of your credential period is the first day of the month *you passed* the exam. For example, if you took an exam on Nov. 9, 2004 your credential period would begin on Nov. 1, 2004, and end on Oct. 31, 2006.

Credential Renewal – Credentialed individuals will receive via email/mail a renewal invoice from IOWWA prior to the end of the two-year credential cycle with information detailing the renewal fees and continuing education submission requirements.

CIOWTS credentialed individuals must submit the appropriate number of contact hours and the appropriate renewal fees postmarked no later than the credential expiration date. If materials and/or fees are received after the credential expiration date a late fee of \$25.00 will apply.

Continuing Education Contact Hours - Part of maintaining and renewing the CIOWTS credential is the submission of approved Continuing Education (CE) within the two year-credential period. Credentialed individuals renewing through IOWWA you must accumulate **12 contact hours** during the two-year credential period. One (1) contact hour is equal to one (1) clock hour of class time.

### Continuing Education Requirements

Content must relate to the onsite wastewater field. For continuing education, only actual time spent in education is allowed.

1. IOWWA will track CE hours received from IOWWA sponsored events for members of IOWWA.
2. Continuing Education (CE) hours for non-IOWWA events must have pre-approval from IOWWA and the certificate of attendance showing CE hours received must be submitted to IOWWA.
3. Please keep copies of your CE submissions and supporting documentation for your records. If an individual cannot provide supporting documentation for a continuing education submission he/she will not be given credit for those hours.
4. **If an individual falls short of meeting the minimum CE hour requirement for the credential and/or does not submit the appropriate renewal fees, he/she will be entered into a one-time grace period that can last for a period of up to 60 days from their credential expiration date. At the end of the grace period all appropriate fees and continuing education hours must be submitted in order to receive the “active” status.**

5. **If a credentialed individual fails to submit the appropriate fees and continuing education hours prior to the end of the 60 day grace period, his/her credential is revoked. In order to re-obtain the credential the individual must reapply and retake the examination.**
6. If an individual has entered into a grace period once and brings their credential up to date but then fails on another occasion to fulfill the renewal requirements, their credential is automatically revoked. To re-obtain his/her credential if it has been previously revoked, he/she may have to reapply and retake the examination.

## **General Policies**

### Denial of Credential due to Ineligibility

It is the policy of IOWWA that no individual shall be excluded from the opportunity to participate in the credential program on the basis of ethnic origin, religion, sex, age or disability. A review and appeals process is available to individuals seeking an amendment of a decision denying eligibility to sit for an examination. The IOWWA Board of Directors conducts the review and appeals process. The decision of the Board is final. Failure of the credentialing examination is not subject for appeal.

### IOWWA Code of Ethics for Credentials Professionals

IOWWA credentialed individuals must acknowledge, accept and abide by the IOWWA Code of Ethics for CIOWTS credentialed professionals. All IOWWA credentialed individuals must agree to and sign the statement below as part of their application to IOWWA credentialing and after they have achieved credential status.

- As long as my credential is in an active status, I shall endeavor to keep myself current and informed and satisfy any continuing education requirements that may be in effect for my credential.
- I will proudly represent my credentialed status and the credential itself to my professional peers, and to the public I serve.
- In the course of performing my duties, I will conduct myself in a professional manner befitting of my credentialed status.
- For the sake of elevating the recognition and status of my field, I will actively encourage my professional colleagues to consider earning this credential for themselves.
- I will do nothing to undermine, detract from, or otherwise cause to develop any damaging associations with respect to this credential.
- I accept that any activity on my part that will cause this credential any measure of injury serves as a breach and a failure on my part to uphold this code of ethics. Moreover, I accept that such action, for which I might be responsible, could result in the revocation of my credential.
- I commit that my professional goal is to serve humankind by doing whatever I am able to do in the course of carrying out my professional responsibilities to maintain and provide a healthful environment for all.

### Revocation of Credential – Due to Misconduct

IOWWA reserves the right to revoke the credential of any individual holding a CIOWTS credential due to misconduct. The right to deny, revoke, or suspend a credential is vested in the IOWWA Board of Directors. All decisions shall be verified and upheld by IOWWA's Board of Directors. Prior to a credential being denied, revoked, or suspended the individual shall be notified in writing of the charges that warrant such action. Any individual whose credential comes under review for denial, revocation, or suspension may submit a written appeal to the IOWWA Board of Directors within thirty (30) calendar days after notification of charges. Misconduct includes but is not limited to:

- Falsification of credential application;
- Falsification of Credential renewal application;
- Falsification of any information requested by IOWWA;
- Failure to submit appropriate credential fees;
- Misrepresentation of credential status;
- Gross or repeated malpractice or negligence;
- Cheating or other irregularities related to the administration of an IOWWA examination;
- Revocation or suspension of their state credential (if applicable);
- Failure to maintain the confidentiality of credential examination questions or answer sheet;
- Limitation or sanction imposed by another professional organization relating to environmental health;
- Unauthorized possession of, use of or access to CIOWTS examinations, certificates, wallet identification cards, logos or IOWWA, the terms of the Certified Installer Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems, and abbreviations relating to these terms, and any other IOWWA documents and materials;
- Habitual use of alcohol, any drug or any substance, or any physical or mental condition which impairs competent and objective professional performance;
- Failure to report a known violation of IOWWA's standards, policies or procedures;
- Violation of any provision of the IOWWA Code of Ethics for CIOWTS Credentialed Professionals;
- The conviction or plea of guilty or plea of nolo contendere to a felony or misdemeanor related to environmental health.

### Special Accommodations for Candidates with Disabilities or Impairments

IOWWA is committed to ensuring that no individual is deprived of the opportunity to take a credentialing examination solely by reason of a disability or impairment. All test centers are fully accessible and compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

To make a request for special accommodations you must complete the Accommodation Request Form and Documentation of Disability Related Needs Form, including the specific diagnosis of your disability; medical records; or other written proof of the diagnosis by an appropriately licensed professional; and the type of type of accommodation being requested. Both forms must be returned to IOWWA at least 30 days prior to the scheduled test date. If the forms are not returned to IOWWA within 30 days prior to the scheduled test date your request for special accommodations may not be honored.

With respect to all matters related to testing accommodations, IOWWA will only communicate with the candidate, professionals knowledgeable about the candidate's disability or impairment, and the candidate's authorized representative (if applicable).

### Application Withdrawal Policy

Withdrawal of a credentialing application after it has been submitted to IOWWA must be requested in writing to IOWWA. The application fee is non-refundable for all applications, including those found to be ineligible, no exceptions. **Written requests for refunds of examination fees will be honored only up to ninety (90) days after the fees have been processed by IOWWA.**

### Credential Grace Period Policy

When an IOWWA credentialed person fails to submit the credential renewal fees and/or fulfill the required number of continuing education hours within the specified credential period, he/she is automatically entered into a grace period that can last for a period of up to 60 days from their credential expiration date. At the end of the grace period all appropriate fees and continuing education hours must be received by NEHA in order to maintain active status of the credential.

If a credential holder fails to submit the appropriate fees and continuing education hours prior to the end of the grace period, his/her credential will be inactivated. In order to re-obtain the credential, the individual may have to reapply and retake the examination.

### Active Military Duty

Should a CIOWTS credential individual be deployed under active military duty a "freeze" can be put on the credential until the individual returns from active duty. During this "freeze" period the credential is still active, however the individual is not responsible for submitting renewal fees or continuing education hours. Upon returning, the credential would be "unfrozen". A request freeze a credential must be submitted in writing to IOWWA with a copy of orders. In order to unfreeze the credential, a request must be submitted in writing to IOWWA with a copy of discharge papers. For example, if the credential period is from 11/1/03-11/31/05, and the individual is deployed for active military duty on 4/1/04, once he/she returns they would have 18 months before the credential is set to expire.

### Basic Level and Advanced Level Test Information

**Basic Level:** The exam contains 75 questions involving the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to successfully install an onsite wastewater system. State and local codes are not covered. Passing score is 70% correct.

**Advanced Level:** The exam contains 125 questions involving the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to successfully install an onsite wastewater system. The questions contain more difficult scenarios than the basic level and require the test-taker to apply their knowledge to different situations. Passing score is 70% correct.