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VIA EMAIL

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Attn: Steve Geis – EA/7
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101 S. Webster Street
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RE: Comments of the Municipal Environmental Group – Wastewater Division
SS 163-20/Board Orders WY-26-20(E) and WY-27-20

Mr. Geis:

I am submitting these comments on behalf of the Municipal Environmental Group–Wastewater Division (MEG Wastewater). MEG Wastewater is an organization of approximately 100 municipalities statewide who own and operate wastewater treatment plants. MEG represents facilities ranging in size from small sanitary districts to larger utilities. MEG appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Scope Statement for revisions to rules including NR 114 and relating to the third party administration of operator certification exams.

MEG supports the department’s efforts identified in this statement of scope to revise NR 114 to allow for third party administration of online examinations for wastewater operator certification. Wastewater treatment operators provide essential services for residents and businesses across the state. Due to COVID-19, in-person wastewater operator examinations have been suspended, jeopardizing the proper licensure of these essential workers. Allowing for the third party administration of online exams, and doing so quickly, is vital to ensuring the continued safe and effective operation of our wastewater treatment systems as well as compliance with state and federal regulations. The urgency of this matter is why we support the development of both emergency and permanent rules regarding third-party administration of online examinations.

MEG also supports the department’s intention to partner with a third party to administer online examinations. There are numerous vendors for online examinations that are already well established and have the knowledge and tools to successfully implement an online examination process. It would be significantly less efficient to require the department to establish its own platform and process for the administration of online examinations. Further, MEG anticipates that the allowance for third party

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administration of operator examinations will enable significantly more exam opportunities each year than are currently provided under the department administered in person system and believes that this should be reflected in the rule revisions as they are developed.

MEG recognizes that even with the promulgation of emergency rules, implementation of online exams will take some time. While MEG appreciates that the department is working to administer some limited in-person exams, it is very likely that there will be operators who cannot secure a place in these limited in-person exams who are in need of certification prior to the commencement of the online exam option. MEG therefore supports the inclusion in the emergency rule of an extension of the expiration date of any licenses issued prior to March 1, 2020.

Finally, MEG requests that the department evaluate all options in partnering with third party administrators to limit increases in fees for examinations. Again, wastewater operators provide an essential service across the state, and it is vital that we continue to support our current wastewater operators and encourage new engagement in this field. Any significant increase in fees could discourage continued and new participation in this workforce.

Thank you for consideration of these comments. We look forward to continuing to participate in this process.

Sincerely,

STAFFORD ROSENBAUM LLP



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Paul G. Kent

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