

AN UPDATE ON THE GEORGIA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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Abstract. In 2003 HB285 amended the Georgia Erosion and Sediment Control Act (GESA) to require all persons involved in land development design, review, permitting, construction, monitoring, or inspection, or any land disturbing activity to meet the education and training certification requirements listed by December 31, 2006. It was estimated that 20,000 persons would require certification to be in accordance with the new law. By revising the Georgia Erosion and Sedimentation Act, Georgia's permitting process agreed with federal requirements under the Clean Water Act. GSWCC was charged with developing and administering the certification program in consultation with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) and the Governor appointed Stakeholder Advisory Board. GSWCC, GAEPD and the Stakeholder Advisory Board established three certification courses, created course agendas, course curriculum and developed course certification requirements. To date, 26,000 total certifications have been issued. A continuing education/recertification program is now being developed.

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that Georgia has been experiencing extraordinary population growth over the past three decades. With this population growth, Georgia's construction industry has also taken off. As a result of this massive growth and expansion, more stress has been put on Georgia's natural resources. Runoff from urban construction sites has deposited significant amounts of sediment into local water bodies and has negatively impacted water quality. Under the previous GESA, Georgia had inadequate training for inspectors and no unified approach to the inspection or permitting process.

As a result of the continued impacts of development and construction, HB 285 amended the Georgia Erosion and Sedimentation Control in 2003. HB285 charged the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC) with the development and administration of a

statewide erosion and sediment control education and certification program. The law reads: "...After December 31, 2006, all persons involved in land development, design, review, permitting, construction, monitoring or inspection shall meet the education and training certification requirements dependant upon their level of involvement with the process as developed by the Commission in consultation with EPD and the Stakeholder Advisory Board." At the time of this amendment, an estimated 20,000 persons would require certification.

With the assistance of GAEPD and the guidance of the Stakeholder Advisory Board, GSWCC developed an educational program to address numerous groups of participants in the erosion and sediment control industry. The educational program was designed to include stand alone courses that would allow participants to attend only one level of certification courses at a time and to work towards higher levels of certification with time. GSWCC has been responsible for developing training materials and making them available online, preparing instructors and proctors through a training program, assisting participants in determining who, within their organizations, needs to attend these classes and also in scoring all examinations and maintaining a comprehensive database of certified persons.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The GSWCC Education and Certification Program is a multi-level certification program with varying requirements for each level of certification and different educational requirements.

Level 1A-Fundamentals

The Level 1A-Fundamentals course is designed to provide sufficient training to all participants as to applicable laws, requirements, processes and the latest means and methods recognized by the State to effectively control erosion and sedimentation. Topics covered in this course include fundamentals of erosion and sediment

control, the Georgia Erosion and Sediment Control Act, National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, field maintenance, stream buffers, and vegetative and structural best management practices (BMPs). This is a one day course with an examination at the end of the course. This course has a one hour, 50 question examination that requires a passage rate of 70 percent for certification. This course is designed primarily for contractors, builders, site superintendents, grading and utility contractors, developers and monitoring consultants. No prior erosion control experience is required to participate in this course. Persons receiving Level 1A certification become “Certified Personnel.”

Level 1B-Advanced Fundamentals

The Level 1B-Advanced Fundamentals course is designed to provide additional information and details regarding the installation and maintenance of BMPs for both regulatory and non-regulatory inspectors. This is a two day training course with an examination at the end of the course. Topics covered in this course include the role of an inspector, ES&PC planning review and local program overview criteria. This course has a one hour, 50 question examination that requires a passage rate of 70 percent for certification. This course is designed for regulatory inspectors and individuals contracted to perform regulatory inspections. There is a requirement of 60 days prior experience in the erosion and sediment control field or Level 1A certification to participate in this course. Persons receiving Level 1B certification become “Certified Inspectors.”

Level 2-Introduction to Design

The Level 2-Introduction to Design course is designed to provide required training to design and review a successful erosion, sedimentation and pollution control plan. Topics covered in this course include design and review of Erosion, Sedimentation and Pollution Control Plans. This is a two day course with an examination at the end of the course. This course has a one hour, 50 question examination that requires a passage rate of 70 percent for certification. This course is designed for plan reviewers and design professionals with a Georgia professional licensure in the fields of engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, forestry, geology or land surveying or current certification by CPESC, Inc. There is a requirement of six months prior field experience in the erosion and sediment control field or Level 1B certification for plan reviewers to participate in this course. Persons receiving Level 2 certification become “Certified Design Professionals” or “Certified Planner Reviewer.”

Awareness Course

In addition to the three certification courses, GSWCC also offers an Awareness course to provide general knowledge and information of Georgia’s erosion and sediment control laws and requirements. There is no educational or field experience requirement to participate in this course. This is a two hour course with no examination. In most cases, soil and water conservation districts host these courses in their districts to provide the general public with more information on erosion and sediment control.

Train-the-Trainer

The Train-the-Trainer course is designed to provide training and qualification for Level 1A, Level 1B and Level 2 trainers and instructors as to applicable laws and BMPs and design of erosion, sedimentation and pollution control plans in the state. This course has a two hour, 100 question exam that requires an 85 percent passage rate for certification. To be eligible to participate in this course as a Level 1 (Fundamentals, Advanced Fundamentals and Awareness) Trainer, a four year college degree or five years prior experience in the erosion and sediment control field is required. In addition, a minimum of five years experience in the erosion and sediment control field. When years of experience are used in lieu of the education requirement, a total of 10 years of field experience is required.

To be eligible to participate in this course as a Level 2 (Introduction to Design) Trainer, a four year college degree in engineering or natural sciences or five years of professional licensure in the field of engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, forestry, geology or land surveying as a CPESC is required. In addition, a minimum of five years experience in the erosion and sediment control field is required. A total of 10 years of field experience is required when years of professional licensure or CPESC certification serves in lieu of the education requirement. All instructors must be approved by the GSWCC Board and the Stakeholder Advisory Board.

Proctor Training

All examinations in the GSWCC Education and Certification program must be administered by an approved proctor. To become a proctor a person must meet the following requirements: 1) Be at least 18 years of age, 2) Be a resident of Georgia, 3) Submit a completed application and an affidavit, 4) Submit 3 personal references, and 5) Attend an “Approved Proctor Training Session.” Approved Proctor Training Sessions are a half day course in which individuals are trained in test security, exam procedures, and proctoring administration. GSWCC reviews each proctor application for compliance and posts proctor contact

information on the GSWCC website. Once approved, GSWCC maintains an "Approved Proctors" list on their website.

Examinations are administered by Approved Proctors and are then returned to GSWCC for scoring. All Education and Certification examinations are scored by GSWCC personnel. Scores are posted on the GSWCC website, and certification letters and cards are mailed to those receiving certification.

PROGRAM SUCCESS

The first pilot courses were offered on April 13, 2005. Since those initial classes, more than 26,000 certifications have been issued. 28,000 persons have participated in education and certification classes. 55 Level 1A courses have been offered by GSWCC and 966 Level 1A courses have been offered by Approved Instructors. 21,656 Level 1A certifications have been received. As of December 10, 2006:

- 13 Level 1B courses have been offered by GSWCC and 165 Level 1B courses have been offered by Approved Level 1B instructors. A total of 2,158 Level 1B certifications have been received.
- 15 Level 2 courses have been offered by GSWCC and 132 Level 2 courses have been offered by Approved Level 2 Instructors. A total of 2,634 Level 2 certifications have been received.
- 14 Train-the-Trainer courses have been offered by GSWCC. 107 Level 1 instructors have been approved and 58 Level 2 instructors have been approved.
- 7 Proctor courses have been offered by GSWCC. 200 proctors have been approved.

FUTURE PLANS

In August 2006, GSWCC invited trainers to attend a meeting to provide constructive criticism regarding the current training materials. 45 approved trainers attended this meeting and offered comments. Once meeting minutes were compiled, they were presented to the Stakeholder Advisory Board for review and consideration. A Technical Advisory Committee has currently been formed to review all of the comments and assist GSWCC in updating the current educational materials.

GSWCC is also working to develop a Continuing Education/Re-certification program. GSWCC plans to have this program established by the end of 2007 that will offer those that have received any level of

certification the opportunity to earn continuing education credits. In addition, a review curriculum will be developed for anyone wishing to receive recertification. When a person lets his or her certification lapse, expire or does not meet continuing education requirements, that person will be required to retake the course and examination.

CONCLUSION

Through the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission's Education and Certification Program, more than 26,000 certifications have been received in erosion and sediment control. The GSWCC has met the State Legislature's mandate by offering an educational program that is uniform throughout the state. The GSWCC Education and Certification Program provides participants with information on the laws pertaining to erosion and sediment control as well as training on the proper installation of best management practices to prevent sediment entering Georgia's water sources.

In the future, GSWCC is updating its current educational program materials as well developing a continuing education program to maintain certification. Continuing Education will allow GSWCC to provide the most current information on erosion and sediment control legislation and technology.

LITERATURE CITED

Official Code of Georgia 12-7-19, Act 36, House Bill 285, effective May 27, 2003.