

# Water Industry Professionals Association

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**T**he Water Industry Professionals Association (WIPA) is an operator registration programme that has been set up to ensure and maintain a high level of competency within the industry.

Those wanting to be registered as a WIP (water industry professional) must meet certain criteria that demonstrate their qualifications, experience and good character, which will ensure the professionalism of the association.

The initiative has been established by Water New Zealand and the Water Industry Operations Group of NZ (WIOG), and will be administered by Connexis, the infrastructure ITO.

Initially, registration will be voluntary, but the aim is to have mandatory registration within local authorities and their contractors in the future.

The water industry needs to recognise the critical and key role operational staff play in the operations and maintenance of water and wastewater networks. By implementing a professional registration programme, we can provide assurance to consumers that our drinking water and waste disposal is constructed, operated and maintained by registered specialists, who have the necessary skills, qualifications and competency.

With recent events, such as that in Havelock North, the water industry is under the microscope in respect of the effectiveness of the New Zealand Drinking Water Standards, industry training, and procurement and engagement of suppliers.

WIPA registration will provide industry stakeholders with a list of water and wastewater staff who are committed to best practice and who are complying with industry standards. Along with providing professionalism and recognition of operational staff involved in the treatment, maintenance and construction of water and wastewater assets, WIPA will raise the profile of the water industry operations sector, attracting a younger generation to the industry.

Members of WIPA (or WIPs – Water Industry Professionals) will be employees of organisations responsible for operating and maintaining water or wastewater treatment plants and reticulation, and employees of organisations responsible for constructing water and wastewater assets. In other words, local authorities and contractors.

The implementation of WIPA and its acceptance by stakeholders and employers will benefit everyone in the industry. In particular:

- It will provide reassurance that the industry adequately maintains safe drinking water supplies.
- It will ensure that wastewater treatment operates in a manner that protects the environment.
- It will control and ensure the operation of bulk water collection and distribution systems are done so in a manner that protects the public and the environment, and conserves our precious water resources.

## Benefits to employers

- Employers can rest assured that their employees who are registered with WIPA have the necessary skills for their roles, and that they are committed to excellence in their role through continued professional development (CPD).
- The continued professional development units required should be attainable within a company's existing training spend.
- Employers will also benefit from increased productivity and long-term employment through the enhanced employee engagement registration with WIPA will bring.
- By insisting on using registered WIPs, employers would be practising sound risk management, and it will help develop and maintain a professional profile with key clients.

## Benefits to employees

- As WIPs (water industry professionals), employees registered with WIPA will gain greater recognition for their skills, experience and competence by their employers and within the industry.
- WIP employees will be recognised as professionals working in an essential area of public health.
- Registration with WIPA will enhance employees career opportunities within the industry, and their membership of the association will provide interaction and networking opportunities with other industry professionals at training workshops, conferences and on social media.
- This enhanced engagement will lead to increased job satisfaction.

- It will ensure knowledge of appropriate technical standards, legislation, codes of practice and NZ standards is maintained.
- It will ensure water operatives that work on water and wastewater networks are qualified, experienced and competent.
- It will raise the profile of the water industry, creating a more attractive career path.

The programme is being implemented by the WIPA committee, who will oversee and support the initiative and provide ongoing support to registered WIPs.

Its purpose is to evaluate and approve applicants for WIP registration and evaluate and approve training providers that want to deliver continued professional development (CPD) training.

The committee will also be responsible for implementing and maintaining the Connexis database where all WIP registrations and training providers will be administered.

With changes in technology and greater emphasis on the protection of public health and the environment, the committee aims to promote high standards of technical expertise and professional conduct.

To be considered for registration, applicants will have to hold an approved NZQA water qualification, have four years' practical experience in the industry and have letters of recommendation from a senior representative of their employer, and a senior representative of an external organisation, such as a training assessor, client or local government.

Membership entails a registration fee of \$200, and an annual fee of \$150. WIPA members receive a certificate of registration and their names will be accessible by the public on the WIPA webpage.

They will receive a summary of CPD tier requirements and expectations. The committee believes that CPD of employees working in the water industry is paramount to building healthier communities, more productive and safer workplaces, and improved public confidence in the water industry. Consequently, CPD is mandatory and is a condition of re-registration, which takes place every two years. In this time, members are required to complete a minimum of 30 hours professional development.

CPD units can be achieved through either operation or specific training, or personal development. This could be in-house training by approved trainers, recognised equipment supplier training, hygiene and disinfection training, attendance at an industry conference or workshop, presenting a paper at a recognised forum, academic study, leading a project or workplace assessment.

The majority of people working in our industry are passionate about the crucial service they provide to their communities. Registration with WIPA demonstrates their ongoing commitment to maintaining industry best practices, and encourages continual development.

We recognise that standards have to be raised to boost public health, and WIPA will help achieve this. **WNZ**