

Continuing Competence

WAMITAB's director general, **Lawrence Strong**, explains the journey to Continuing Competence, along with those who have first hand experience of the new process

Deemed Competent? Achieved your Certificate of Technical Competence (CoTC) before 22 December 2008? Environment Agency assessed for a non-CoTC activity? If the answer is "yes", then Continuing Competence applies to you.

The Operator Competence scheme, developed by CIWM and WAMITAB, includes a requirement to maintain competence over time, which we have entitled Continuing Competence. Although everyone would readily sign up to the principle of maintaining competence, the challenge is how to deliver this in practice in a way that is cost-effective, provides equal opportunity and is available to individuals within

small, medium and large organisations throughout England and Wales. The Continuing Competence aspect of our scheme meets these criteria and includes a "test" for the first time. However, Continuing Competence for the purposes of Technical Competence is only intended to cover compliance with relevant waste controls and policy. The experience of successful candidates from within WRG and Lincolnshire County Council has been useful in de-mystifying the concept of the new test, as detailed in the two examples given here. Continuing Competence, and the resultant test, are still new to the industry and it will take time to raise awareness with employers, employees

and the regulator in England and Wales. However, the clock has already started ticking! The test is continuously being reviewed based on feedback from candidates, for example, and we have already added information, advice and guidance to the syllabuses to help candidates prepare for the tests, and we will have past papers available when the current questions are reviewed in advance of the second two-year period, which starts in March 2011. I would encourage those who need to pass the test to book one in good time to avoid any problems towards the end of 2010. [CIWM](http://www.ciwm.org.uk)

Visit www.wamitab.org.uk or call +44 (0)1604 231950

Keith Singleton (pictured above right), senior area inspector for Lincolnshire County Council Environmental Services

KEITH HAS three CoTCs dating back to 1995 and covering landfill and transfer/treatment. After reading about the Continuing Competence scheme he decided to contact SERAC, a WAMITAB approved centre, to see what training they could offer. Keith said: "I decided to take the opportunity to train myself and another colleague, as well as 12 other people within the Council who were working towards their Level 4 CoTC. The morning training session was revision, legislation, duty of care, WEEE, waste types etc, followed by a dummy run of the test using laptops and multiple choice questions. The course was a very good refresher, as well as preparing me for the test. The next day I went on to the WAMITAB website, followed the very clear instructions and booked a test in Lincoln.

The day before the test I received a text message from WAMITAB reminding me of the time and date of the test. On the day I had some difficulty finding the test centre but, once inside, the invigilator offered me a drink, asked for my booking confirmation and photo ID and confirmed the tests I would be doing. I was instructed to read the questions carefully and shown how to access the test page on the computer.

I had booked to take the generic section and three specific options, so I decided to start with the generic section first, although you can take them in any order. I went through the questions three times before moving on to do the specific options. Fortunately the course work in the training had covered all the learning required for these options so I was quietly confident of passing them. At the end of each paper I called the invigilator and each time he asked if I was okay, how it had gone and if I wanted a comfort break.

After the test I was expecting the result there and then, but WAMITAB informed me that they needed to look at the test results in the early stages of the scheme; in future people will know at the end of the test if they have passed or failed. I was relieved to find out two days later that I had passed all parts of the test with flying colours when a large letter from WAMITAB arrived containing my Continuing Competence certificate.

Overall I thought the test was pretty fair and reasonable, but you have to be "in the game" to know the answers and I definitely needed prior training and a dummy run to be successful."



CIWM Says...

WE ALL need to ensure we keep up-to-date to maintain our professionalism, and this is a good opportunity for those responsible for permitted waste facilities to demonstrate to their customers that they have done just that. There are many ways to ensure you are up-to-date and ready for the test. These could include specially conceived training programmes or existing training products, either internally delivered or externally sourced, to fill the gaps identified using the syllabus. But it doesn't just have to be training courses, you could utilise e-learning or self-managed learning using a variety of different sources, including CIWM regional centre events, News Online, the CIWM Journal, fact sheets, websites etc.

Terry March, CIWM's new president and a WAMITAB external verifier is a keen supporter of the Continuing Competence scheme. He says: "Many people in our sector have to, by law, show that they are technically competent to do their job. As an industry we have picked up this challenge, and now extended it to demonstrate that we stay 'technically competent'."

Stuart Richardson, hazardous waste landfill manager, WRG

IN APRIL 2009, Stuart was the first professional person to take and successfully pass the test. Stuart (pictured furthest right) said: "I took the test for two reasons; one because of the enthusiasm of Derek Chatting, WRG's group training manager, to pilot the actual test (and to be the first to take and achieve it) and secondly to maintain my L4A CoTC which I achieved in 1996.

As a practicing landfill site manager I looked at the syllabuses and imagined the sorts of questions an assessor would ask if I was being assessed now for my CoTC. I also used the sample questions provided by CIWM and WAMITAB to gain experience of the multiple choice format. In fact I did not need much actual preparation for the test because of WRG's in-house approach to ensuring that facility managers are kept up-to-date.

I booked my test at the Pitman Centre in Cambridge, which was easy to find and had pleasant people running it. The worst part of my experience was when I found I had left my spectacles at home, which made it difficult to read the text on the computer screen!

However, using the test centre computer was not a problem as I use computers as part of my every day working life.

The test questions were relevant, although I found some of them 'leading' and occasionally ambiguous. I felt that the generic questions were set at the right level. I was concerned initially at the amount of time I was taking to read the questions – because I read the questions two or three times to ensure I understood what they were asking for – as it turned out I was well within the overall time limit.

My one piece of advice to future candidates is that the test is nothing to be afraid of if you are competent from your day-to-day work at an operational level".

