

**VRQ UPDATES FROM SERAC UK**

SERAC UK - the leading, training and assessment company in waste management services in the UK will be on Stand B29 at FUTURESOURCE 2009, to give the industry updates on the new VRQ option. The company successfully completed the first, four day VRQ course held in the UK at the start of the year and is keen to help waste sector employers understand the benefits.

The VRQ is a much more accessible way of learning. Classroom-based over an intensive four day period, with back-up assessment in employees' own time, it is seen as more realistic than the NVQ's site-based process, where participants can spend up to two years and more gathering their 'evidence'. It gives newcomers to the industry a choice in how they achieve the legally required competence for low and medium risk activities. Also, they gain a meaningful qualification far more quickly, enabling them to get involved with their employers activities in a practical way far earlier. Once on the job, they can continue their education and become increasingly effective.

SERAC UK managing director, Don Glaister, said, "Based on our experience, the VRQ is an essential tool to help Local Authorities and Private Contractors' staff to become competent in waste, environment and health and safety law as it affects our operations.

"We were delighted to have gained the first approval of this VRQ – an award that's all about delivering relevant learning, with speed, efficiency and cost-effectiveness for operators in the waste sector, without lowering standards. It's also a quick and important first step for employees, getting them into the business and productive in the minimum sensible time. It offers an initial high level of very important and valuable competence, setting a firm basis for later learning or NVQ's as employees develop their career. It is exciting that there is now a choice of routes for employees to gain the statutory competence required in the waste management sector under the

new Environmental Permitting Regulations. We anticipate a lot of interest in this at FUTURESOURCE 2009.

“These certificates result from SERAC running the very first course in the UK. Since then we have run three more and will be running further courses across the UK during 2009; either in-house for larger employers or as open courses for SME employers.”

The new Operator Competence scheme, developed jointly by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) and the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB), is designed to provide a simple and flexible competence framework that meets the needs of an increasingly complex industry – approved by Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government at the end of 2008.

Dr Lawrence Strong, director general of WAMITAB, personally attended the first-ever VRQ award hand-over, at NCC County Hall in Norwich, and said, “WAMITAB, in the shape of the CoTC, has helped this industry to improve technical competence for over 15 years. The changes to operator competence build on what has already been achieved and offer a new ‘risk-based’ system, with learning choices for low and medium risk activities and evidence that waste managers are keeping up to date in a fast moving industry.”

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Further information from:

Simon Hall/Clare Britton  
HALLS  
High Silver House,

High Street,  
Holt,  
Norfolk,  
NR25 6BN

Tel: 01263 715900      Email: info@hallspr.com Fax: 01263 715903

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS - SERAC**

- SERAC is based in Holt in North Norfolk, with an operating network of trainers and assessors across the UK. Founded in 1995, the company employs around 50 people in the key business areas in which it currently operates – the waste management and quarrying and extractives industries
- SERAC is the UK's leading provider of NVQ's and VRQ's in the waste management and quarrying sectors
- SERAC is approved for the Train to Gain programme by the Learning and Skills Council.
- SERAC has both Matrix and Training Quality Standard accreditations.

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS – VRQ SCHEME**

- The joint CIWM/WAMITAB scheme encompasses three key changes to the technical competence framework. It acknowledges and caters for different risk levels to reflect the growing diversity of waste treatment technologies; it provides the flexibility to accommodate individual learning preferences and encourage quicker and wider uptake; it introduces the requirement for 'continuing competence'.
- Supporting the risk-based approach to regulation enshrined in the new Environmental Permitting regime that came into being in April this year, the scheme is designed around three risk levels. High risk facilities, for example, will still require a full NVQ (and CoTC if appropriate), but technical competence for a medium risk operation can be achieved by completing either six technical NVQ units or a new Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ), which is a taught course and assessment qualification. For low risk facilities, the options include a short course with a final test at the end (an Environmental Permit Operator's Certificate or EPOC) or four technical NVQ units.
- As well as catering for different learning preferences, this system also encourages quicker and wider uptake of technical competence by opening up more opportunities. Candidates taking the VRQ, for example, do not have to be observed on site, which means personnel can be trained prior to a facility becoming operational and professionals looking to transfer into waste management from other industries can get trained before they move.
- The third element is 'continuing competence', an important consideration for an industry that is working hard to professionalise its image. Applicable to all technically competent persons (i.e. current CoTC holders), including those who have been 'deemed competent' or Environment Agency assessed, the scheme introduces a two year continuing competency period, during which candidates must update and demonstrate their knowledge about subjects specified in a 'syllabus' set

every two years by a cross-industry working party. Candidates can choose how they update their knowledge but they must complete the learning and be tested successfully on it within the two year timeframe. Continuing competence tests will be available from 1st March 2009 and there will be around 50 test centres across England and Wales.

- The new scheme is open to operators of all types of waste management facility previously subject to the 'fit and proper person' requirements. Existing operators of permitted facilities do not necessarily need to take any action now but will in due course be required to demonstrate 'continuing competence', either by joining the CIWM/WAMITAB scheme or any further scheme approved by Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government. Demonstration of continuing competence will also apply to operators of permitted facilities that have never been assessed as 'fit and proper persons' and who have until now been 'deemed competent'. For new entrants, the scheme applies immediately.
- CIWM/WAMITAB have agreed to develop the scheme further to accommodate waste operations requiring environmental permits for the first time depending on the outcome of the review of exemptions from permitting being undertaken jointly by Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Environment Agency. Operators of such facilities will be given 12 months from the date on which the permit is granted to obtain the relevant competence award.

More details on the scheme can be found at [www.wamitab.org.uk](http://www.wamitab.org.uk) or [www.ciwm.co.uk](http://www.ciwm.co.uk).

#### **SUBJECT BACKGROUND:**

1. Until April 2008, applicants for waste management licences and permits for specified waste management activities under the Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) system had been required to demonstrate that they were 'fit and proper persons' prior to the grant of a licence by the Environment Agency ('the Agency'). The fit and proper person test included a provision that the Agency could refuse the grant of a permit if it considered that the activities to be carried out would not be in the hands of a technically competent person(s). The requirements applied to England, Wales and Scotland.
2. Technical competence was vested in individual managers. Demonstration of technical competence was demonstrated either via the manager holding a Certificate of Technical Competence (CoTC) awarded by WAMITAB or (where the activity was outside the CoTC scheme) via assessment of individuals by the Environment Agency.
3. The Environment Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2007 came into force on 6 April 2008 and replaced the waste management licensing and pollution prevention and control systems. Regulation 13 replaces the previous 'fit and proper person test' and provides that the Environment Agency may refuse applications for permits if it believes the applicant will not operate the facility in accordance with the environmental permit.
4. As part of the development of the new environmental permitting regime, Defra invited the waste management industry to develop new technical competence schemes to replace or supplement the existing CoTC's. Two proposals were developed, the first by the Chartered Institution of Waste Management (CIWM) and the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB) and the second by Environmental Services Association (ESA) jointly with Energy and Utility Skills (EU Skills). The

latter scheme remains under development.

5. Consultation on the proposals for the two schemes of technical competence was included in the EPP's fifth consultation on guidance for a streamlined environmental permitting and compliance system (18 July to 10 October 2007). The Government published a summary of responses to the fifth consultation in January 2008.
6. The Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) is the leading professional body for the waste management sector representing over 7000 individuals in the UK and overseas. Established in 1898, CIWM is a non profit-making organisation, dedicated to the promotion of professional competence amongst waste managers. CIWM seeks to raise standards for those working in and with the sector by producing best practice guidance, developing educational and training initiatives, and providing information on key waste-related issues. Comprehensive information about CIWM can be found at [www.ciwm.co.uk](http://www.ciwm.co.uk)

WAMITAB was established in 1989 with a remit to determine and advise on policy and standards of education, qualifications and training for all employees in the Waste Management Industry. WAMITAB is the awarding body for the waste management industry in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and joint awarding body, with SQA, for qualifications in Scotland.