

the alternatives have arrived

THE CONNECTIONS COURSE

The Monthly Dirt

A monthly newsletter on the California Construction General Permit

Choices, choices , choices, so many choices!

Are you old enough to remember five and dime stores? (I think they are now called dollar stores ... *inflation!*) But, I remember going to our local TG&Y dime store as a kid with my sisters. Each of us would have that week's allowance money in our hands (maybe a quarter) that we could spend on ourselves. Of course the wide selection of pieces of candy was the main draw. It would take me about 3 seconds to decide what I wanted ... but for my younger sister it took seemingly hours for her to settle on what to get. There were all those choices! In this edition of **The Monthly Dirt**, we are going to cover the exciting new choices that storm water professionals now have in meeting their California QSP and QSD prerequisite requirements.

The need for more choices: When the 2009 Construction General Permit (CGP) introduced the QSP and QSD credentials, it required that the person applying for the credential receive the 2 or 3-day California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA) sponsored training and also have what was then called an "underlying" certification or what is now referred to as a **prerequisite**. The 2009 CGP options included the following:

- A QSD shall have one of the following registrations or certifications, and appropriate experience, as required for:
 - a. A California registered professional civil engineer;
 - b. A California registered professional geologist or engineering geologist;
 - c. A California registered landscape architect;
 - d. A professional hydrologist registered through the American Institute of Hydrology;
 - e. A Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control (CPESC)TM registered through Enviro Cert International, Inc.;
 - f. A Certified Professional in Storm Water Quality (CPSWQ)TM registered through Enviro Cert International, Inc.; or
 - g. A professional in erosion and sediment control registered through the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies (NICET).

The problem is that, over the 13-year tenure of the permit, some of these options became no longer available and that the remaining non-academic options were predominately being offered by a single organization. As such, the State Water Board stated,

"Since the adoption of the 2009 CGP, some of the prerequisite options were discontinued. The remaining prerequisites rely heavily on years of experience preventing new stormwater professionals from obtaining the necessary QSD or QSP prerequisites. Due to the limited number of approved prerequisites for QSD and QSP certification, the 2022 CGP

*includes a provision (Section V.H.) to allow for the consideration of additional training courses as valid prerequisites. Additional approved prerequisites will provide more pathways for new stormwater professionals to obtain QSD and QSP certifications and consequently, support the expanded construction stormwater QSD and QSP responsibilities in the 2022 CGP."*²

The Water Board was concerned that the lack of prerequisite options was causing a bottleneck to occur in the industry impeding the number of QSPs and QSDs needed for CGP implementation. But, **lack of choices** was only part of the reason for the bottleneck. A more significant reason, I believe, was due to the lack of training available for storm water professionals. To be clear, there was no lack of training opportunities for the 2 and 3-day QSP and QSD classes. Many individuals would sign up for and attend these classes and even pass the accompanying online exam, only to find themselves stuck and not able to move forward with their credential pursuit. For the most part, the non-academic prerequisite options for QSPs and QSDs were, and continue to be, certifications of knowledge and not actual learning opportunities. Formerly, I was a presenter for the 1-day review course for one of these certificate programs. At that time, we were instructed to communicate to those attending that the review session was just that—a **review** of what

they were already expected to know. We would not be covering everything in the review session that they needed to know in order to pass the very rigorous certification exam. So as a result, those pursuing that credential would often cram for the exam and hope for the best. In those days, the review presenters also proctored the exams. So, in my somewhat limited experience and perspective, I observed that only about 50% of first time test takers passed the exam, on their second attempt about 75% would pass, and for the third attempt, the pass rate was about 90%. I would tell those in my review class that persistence pays off and to consider the first exam attempt as part of the overall "learning" process.

But all along I was thinking that there must be a better way. How can someone really learn erosion and sediment theory, control measures, hydrology, and the skills needed to be a good inspector or SWPPP developer?

New Choices: As the Monthly Dirt editor, and someone committed to storm water education, I was excited to see new opportunities in the 2022 CGP. I am especially excited to see these opportunities come to fruition. There are now alternatives to the certificates! We no longer need to annually pay an organization to certify that we know what we already know. There are now some actual learning opportunities. As of the date of this Monthly Dirt publication, there are now **5** new QSP prerequisite options and **5** new QSD

prerequisite options—the majority of which are not certifications of previously gained knowledge but opportunities to learn about this industry!

New QSD options include:

Cuyamaca College, Environmental, Health, & Safety Management Department (Approval Letter)	Successful completion of Stormwater Management Program (HSM Courses: 115, 117, 220, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 228, AND 229)
Ecoplan Environmental, Inc. (Approval Letter)	Certified Designer of Sediment and Erosion Control (CDESC) Certification Must be combined with an existing QSP certification or the successful completion of a QSP prerequisite
WGR Southwest, Inc. (Approval Letter)	The Connections Course, Lessons 1 - 7
CWT Training Academy (Approval Letter)	WCAD101 - California State Qualified SWPPP Developer Prerequisite
M.S. Hatch Consulting, LLC (Approval Letter)	QSD Prerequisite Course Must be combined with an existing QSP certification or the successful completion of a QSP prerequisite

New QSP options include:

M.S. Hatch Consulting, LLC (Approval Letter)	QSP Prerequisite Course
Cuyamaca College, Environmental, Health, & Safety Management Department (Approval Letter)	Successful completion of Stormwater Management Program (HSM Courses: 115, 117, 220, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 228, AND 229)
WGR Southwest, Inc. (Approval Letter)	The Connections Course, Lessons 1 - 4
CWT Training Academy (Approval Letter)	WCAD100 - California State Qualified SWPPP Practitioner Prerequisite
StormwaterONE, LLC (Approval Letter)	Qualified Compliance Inspector of Stormwater Plus (QCIS+) Certification

I also love to see the diversity of the new prerequisite options. They are not clones of each other and, while they all meet the State Water Board's and Construction General Permit Training Team's minimum requirements, they are all distinctly different in style and approach. This is huge because not everyone has the same learning style. If you are not a good test taker, there are prerequisite options that don't require a final exam. You will be able to demonstrate your newly gained knowledge by other means such as homework and class participation.

The State Water Board has provided links to each of the programs, so if you are needing a QSP or QSD prerequisite, go check out the option for yourself and see which one fits your style of learning best.

It is not too late! You can switch:

Perhaps you were one of those QSPs or QSDs who did a little cramming for the exam and feel like you did not get the foundation of knowledge that you wish you had. It is not too late, you now have other options. Instead of paying the annual renewal fee for the certification, you might want to take one of the other courses which provide the level of training you were hoping for. Several of these new courses offer diplomas instead of certificates that must be renewed annually by paying a fee. You could actually end up saving yourself time and money in the long run and gain the knowledge that you have been wanting to have.

The Connections Course: Again, I recommend that you check out all of the options, some of which are offered by a few of my storm water friends and colleagues such as Andrew Demers at StormwaterONE and John Gleason at M.S. Hatch. But I would be remiss if I didn't tell you a little about WGR's prerequisite—[The Connections Course](#). Perhaps attributed to the lack of foundational

education in our industry or due to the increasing reliance on “cookie-cutter” SWPPP templates and BMP installation designs, we had been observing a disconnect in the storm water industry. Theory seemed to be disconnected from practice. What was on the computer screen was often distinctly different than what was on the construction site. People were installing fiber roll with no idea of what it did or how it worked. All of these factors led us to develop a course for storm water professionals that would enable them to “[connect the dots](#)” and develop and implement effective storm water management programs on construction sites. We wanted the course to be robust and highly educational so that individuals who did not have extensive knowledge of erosion theory, hydrology, BMPs, and site stabilization could have a safe environment to learn these skills needed for their profession. Thus, The Connections Course was conceived.

The backbone of the course is a nearly 400-page textbook called [The Raindrop Connection](#). In each of the lessons, class participants are given reading assignments in the textbook. The course received approval as a prerequisite by the Water Board on June 30, 2025 for both the QSP track (which is comprised of the first four lessons) and the QSD track (consisting of all seven lessons).

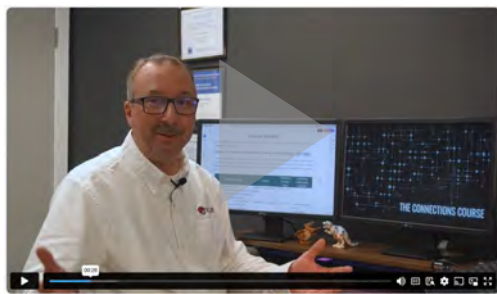


The course is a hybrid of self-study, online learning, and in-person teaching events. Participants may proceed at their own pace. The QSP track has three in-person learning events and the QSD track has six. Two in-person events are presented by the course instructor each week (on Zoom or physically in person at our training center in Lodi) so that over the course of three weeks all six in-person events are covered. The cycle is then repeated so that if someone misses an in-person event it will reoccur every three weeks and there is no limit on how many times you can attend a class.

Unlike other prerequisite options, in The Connections Course, participants learn by doing. The class includes field trips to a hardware store and a construction site. The

Hydrology 101 and 201 classes cover math equations necessary for storm water professionals to know; but there is no pass / fail exam, rather after the in-person class there is a homework assignment that the participant completes. The instructor reviews the submitted assignment, but instead of issuing a grade, provides coaching to the student on where they may have gone wrong in their calculations and encourages them to try again. The course also covers RUSLE2, but we don't just talk about the computer software. Class participants will actually download and use the software as required by the CGP to demonstrate site stabilization, vegetative buffers, and TMDL compliance. The final exam for those in the QSD track is not an exam but rather, using the course's template, they will demonstrate their gained knowledge by preparing a SWPPP which will be reviewed by the course instructor.

However, [The Connections Course is not for everyone](#). If you are looking for quick and easy, there are other choices available to you. If you already have the knowledge, a storm water certificate credential may be what you need. But, if you really want to learn and have a solid foundation for your storm water career, The Connections Course may be a good fit for you. Because our course provides a diploma to graduates, once you are done with us, just like high school, you never need to come back.³



¹ By non-academic we are referring to the underlying / prerequisite options that do not require a **particular** academic degree such as the CPESC, CPSWQ, NICET, CESSWI, or CISEC as opposed to a professional civil engineer, professional geologist, engineering geologist, landscape architect, or professional hydrologists which would be academic pursuits.

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/construction/docs/2024/2022-cgp-qsdqsp-prereq.pdf

³ Continuing education is now required by the CGP and tracked by CASQA so that prerequisite programs do not have to require it.

[Please contact us if you have any questions ...](#)

The Monthly Dirt

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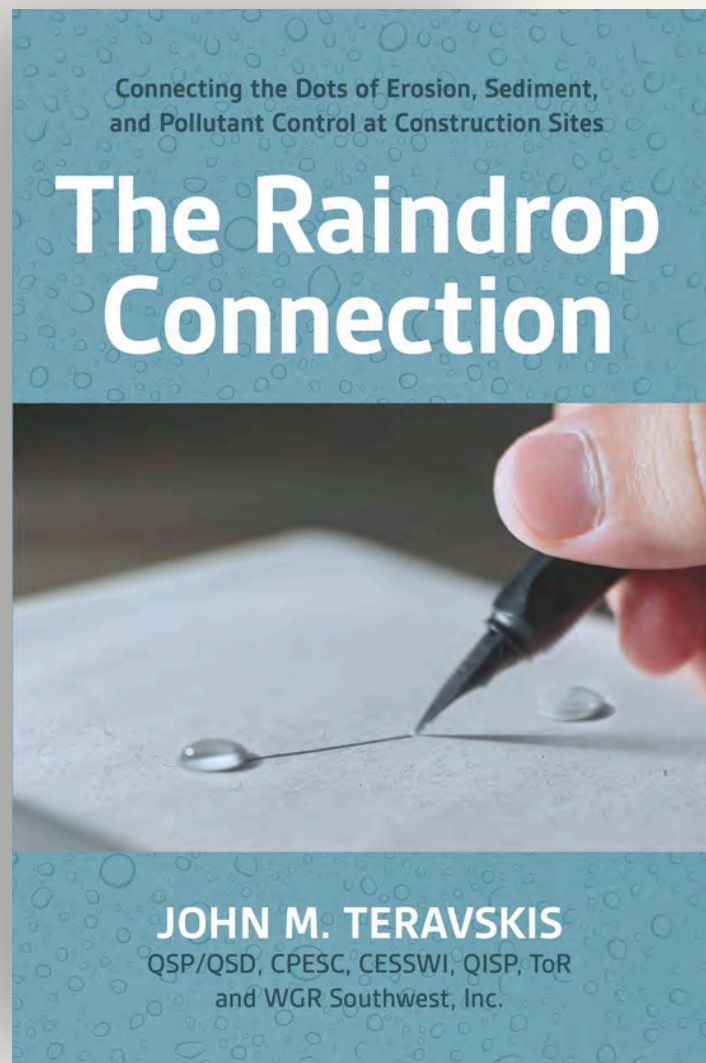
THE CONNECTIONS COURSE

wgr-sw.com/training
[View the Course Syllabus](#)

FROM THE EDITOR OF THE MONTHLY DIRT

THE RAINDROP CONNECTION

A NEW PEER-REVIEWED INDUSTRY TEXTBOOK



Available to purchase separate from The Connections Course

**textbook is included with course enrollment*

wgr-sw.com/TheRaindropConnection



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