

What to Expect on Exam Day

A practical guide for California REHS candidates — what to bring, what to expect, and what to do afterward.

About this guide. This is a free companion to *The California REHS Examination Workbook* (v2.1, 2026). It covers the practical and procedural side of exam day — questions you might be too busy studying to ask. Read it once when you register, and again the week before your exam.

Before Exam Day

Registration and scheduling

The California REHS examination is administered by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Environmental Management Branch, under authority of H&SC; §§106600-106735. You register through the CDPH-REHS program; consult the current CDPH REHS web page for the application packet, fees, and scheduled examination dates.

CDPH evaluates your application — including your degree transcripts and required experience documentation — before authorizing you to sit for the examination. This evaluation typically takes several weeks; submit your application well in advance of the exam window you want to sit for. Once approved, CDPH issues an authorization letter confirming your eligibility and providing test-date and location instructions.

The week before

In the final week, the highest-value uses of your time are:

- Working through the cumulative practice examinations from your workbook under timed conditions, with a closed-book first attempt.
- Reviewing the Critical Values, Formulas & Conversions, and Critical Definitions appendices from your workbook. These are the highest-density-per-page resources.
- Skimming the modules where your diagnostic-pretest or cumulative-exam scoring suggests weak spots. Resist the urge to re-read everything — focused review beats broad re-reading.
- Confirming the testing site address and travel logistics. Know how long the drive takes at the time of day you will travel; account for traffic.
- Sleeping well. The single largest preventable performance drop on a long multiple-choice examination is insufficient sleep the night before.

The day before

No new material. The objective is to enter the testing room calm and confident, not informed on one additional topic. Spend an hour reviewing your Critical Values and Formulas quick-reference sheets. Lay out: your authorization letter, two forms of identification, two pens, a quiet watch (if allowed), and the testing-site address. Confirm reservation if your exam requires it. Eat dinner you know agrees with you; this is not the night to try a new restaurant.

What to Bring on Exam Day

Item	Notes
Government-issued photo ID	Driver license, passport, or state ID. The name MUST match exactly what is on your CDPH authorization.
Authorization letter from CDPH	Required for admission. Print a paper copy even if you have it on your phone.
Secondary form of ID	A credit card or work badge will usually suffice; check current CDPH instructions for your test cycle.
Two pens or pencils	Black ink or #2 pencil. Bring more than you think you need. No mechanical pencils with built-in erasers if specifically prohibited.
Watch (analog, not smart)	For pacing — if permitted by the testing center. Smart watches are typically prohibited.
Light snack and water	For the break, if the testing center permits. Confirm in advance.
Confirmation of testing site	Address, parking instructions, and check-in procedure. Screenshot or printout.
Reading glasses	If you wear them. The exam booklet is small print and you will be reading it for hours.

What to Leave Behind

Testing centers prohibit certain items; possession of any of them in the testing room can be grounds for examination disqualification:

- Cell phones, smart watches, fitness trackers, and any device capable of communication or photography. These are typically required to be stored in a locker or your vehicle.
- Study materials of any kind — textbooks, notes, scratch paper from home, this workbook. Anything not provided by the testing center stays outside.
- Programmable calculators. If a calculator is permitted, it must be a basic four-function or scientific model — confirm specifically with your authorization documentation what your testing center permits.
- Hats with brims, hoods up, or large bags. Coats and bags typically go in a locker.

During the Examination

Check-in

Arrive 30 minutes before your scheduled start time. The check-in process includes ID verification, photograph for the examination record, and storage of personal items in a locker. Late arrivals may be denied admission and required to reschedule (with a fee).

Pacing and breaks

The REHS examination is administered in two booklets of approximately 130 questions each, totaling 260 multiple-choice items. Confirm the current format with your CDPH authorization documentation, as the exact structure may change between cycles. Plan for a brief break between booklets — typically permitted under proctor supervision.

The two-pass strategy. On your first pass through each booklet, answer everything you know cold within ~60-90 seconds per question; flag anything that takes longer for return. Aim to complete the first pass within roughly 60% of the booklet's time allotment. Use the remaining time for second-pass elimination on the flagged items. NEVER leave an answer blank at the end — an unanswered item is a guaranteed zero, while a best-guess gives you at least a 25% chance.

If you hit a hard stretch

Every candidate hits a run of 10-15 questions that feel unfamiliar. This is normal and by design — the examination tests breadth. Three rules:

1. Do not catastrophize. A passing score allows for substantial wrong answers; you do not need 100%, or 90%, or even 80%, to pass.
2. Do not change earlier answers based on the pattern of recent ones. First instincts on well-written multiple-choice items are usually correct unless you can articulate a specific reason for the change.
3. If you genuinely blank, breathe, drink water if permitted, and start the next question fresh. Bad stretches end. Keep moving.

After the Examination

Receiving your results

Results are released by CDPH typically several weeks after your examination cycle closes. A passing result is followed by REHS registration paperwork and payment of the registration fee. Once registered, you are a Registered Environmental Health Specialist authorized to practice in California, with the title and seal that come with it.

If you do not pass

Not passing on a first attempt is more common than candidates expect. CDPH provides general feedback indicating your strongest and weakest subject areas, which is genuinely useful for targeting your re-study. The retake process:

- A retake fee applies — confirm the current amount with CDPH.
- You may retake at the next scheduled examination cycle (typically several months later).
- Use the feedback to identify two or three weak modules and rebuild your study plan around them. Most candidates who do not pass on the first attempt are 1-2 modules short of mastery rather than weak across the board.
- Do not let a non-passing result discourage you. The exam is designed to be difficult, and many practitioners — including many supervisors — required two attempts. The retake is, on average, the higher-scoring attempt because you have a clearer target.

After registration

Your REHS credential carries continuing-education obligations — currently 24 contact hours every two years for renewal. CCDEH conferences, CEHA workshops, and accredited continuing education providers are your primary sources. Track your CE hours from day one of your registration; CDPH can audit at any renewal cycle.

Congratulations in advance. Once you are registered, the title becomes a credential you carry for the rest of your career. The work you put into preparation is preparation not just for one examination, but for the practice of environmental health that follows.

Companion to The California REHS Examination Workbook, v2.1 (2026). © Paracelsus. Free supplement; not for resale. Information about CDPH procedures and fees may change; consult the current CDPH-REHS web page for the authoritative current details for your examination cycle.