

Date: June 30, 2025

To: Environmental Quality Commission

From: Leah Feldon, Director

Subject: Agenda item J, Informational item: Individual National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits Backlog
July 10-11, 2025, EQC meeting

Purpose of item DEQ provides an annual report on the performance of the NPDES Individual Permit Program, specifically regarding progress made in reducing the permitting backlog.

Prior EQC involvement The Water Quality Permitting Program periodically updates the EQC on progress in addressing both backlogged and current permits, as well as the permitting program as a whole.

Background The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regulates the discharges of pollutants to waterways by issuing federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits to point source dischargers of wastewater and stormwater. Under the federal NPDES permit program, permits are effective for a fixed term not to exceed five years (40 CFR 122.46/123.25). Just over 50 percent of the NPDES permits issued by Oregon DEQ are out-of-date and administratively extended. These permits remain in effect but may not reflect updated standards and state and federal regulations. From 2019 to 2025, Oregon DEQ reduced this backlog by greater than 30 percent and is committed to eliminating the NPDES individual permit backlog of administratively continued permits. Through continued implementation of permit development process improvements, DEQ will:

1. Protect water quality and meet all state and federal requirements.
2. Provide continuity of permit requirements throughout Oregon.
3. Educate permittees (municipal and industrial) to better understand and fulfill their permit requirements.
4. Maintain a proficient permit development team of permit writers and subject matter experts.
5. Reduce the time to develop and issue permits.

In addition to the timely development and issuance of permits, efforts over the past year have included ongoing improvements to templates and forms, the timely publication of annual permit issuance plans, and the implementation of Your DEQ Online (YDO) for the water quality permitting program on May 14, 2025.

Content being presented This presentation will provide a comprehensive overview of the permitting process, outline the steps involved in permit development, and highlight the importance of maintaining current permits to ensure environmental compliance and program integrity. The presentation will also include reports on progress made under the Consent Judgement and communicate upcoming actions and priorities that ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the permitting program. For example, when the permitting program institutes improvements to the permitting process or adapts to new regulations, these are consistently applied to all NPDES permittees.

Key issues The permitting program has reached its six-year milestone; however, the resources needed for the transfer to YDO, combined with the recent cyberattack, have put this timeline at risk. Unfortunately, thousands of hours of permit development work documents are currently inaccessible due to the cyberattack.

Like other parts of the agency, this program has experienced workforce transitions and turnover. Six of the ten permit writers in this program have been in their current position for less than five years.

Standardizing the permit development process has led to a more streamlined and consistent approach across the state. As part of this initiative, previously backlogged permits are now being actively renewed. Many permittees who have not received an updated permit for 10 to 25 years are now being issued permits that differ significantly from their previous version. These new permits reflect updated regulatory requirements and current best practices. As a result of these substantial changes, there is an increased need for enhanced outreach and communication with permit holders, as well as improved communication channels with the regional offices.

EQC involvement There is no EQC action associated with this agenda item and DEQ will bring regular updates on this topic to the commission periodically by request.

Supporting materials A. [DEQ's Water Quality Permitting Program webpage](#)

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Translation or other formats

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