

Common Terminology Associated with NPDES Permitting

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit

Permits that control water pollution by regulating point source discharges to waterbodies. (The term “National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System” is from Section 402 of the Clean Water Act.)

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)

A TMDL is a water quality improvement plan for a waterbody that specifies the maximum amount of a pollutant allowed to enter a waterbody so that the waterbody will meet the water quality criterion for that particular pollutant. It typically places limits for the particular pollutant on point and non-point sources of pollution.

Water Quality Standards

Water quality standards define goals for surface waters by designating beneficial uses, setting criteria to protect those uses and establishing provisions to protect water quality from pollutants.

Designated Beneficial Uses

Beneficial uses are designated for each waterbody and include domestic water supply, fishing, industrial water supply, irrigation, boating, water contact recreation, livestock watering, aesthetic quality, fish and aquatic life, hydropower, wildlife and hunting, and commercial navigation and transportation.

Water Quality Criteria

Maximum allowable pollutant concentrations established for the protection of the designated beneficial uses. These can be numeric or narrative.

Water Quality Based Effluent Limits (WQBELs)

Point source effluent limits designed to meet water quality criteria.

Technology Based Effluent Limits (TQBELs)

Point source effluent limits aimed to prevent pollution by requiring a minimum level of effluent quality that is attainable using demonstrated technologies for reducing discharges of pollutants. TQBELs are developed independently of the potential impact of a discharge on the receiving water.

Impaired Waterbodies (303d List)

A list that identifies waterbodies failing to meet water quality criteria for specific pollutants. This list is reviewed and prioritized to develop TMDLs.