



Public Hearings on the Draft NPDES Permit for Surface Discharging Private Sewage Disposal Systems

COMMON Q & A

What is an NPDES permit?

Both federal and state laws prohibit discharges of contaminants to streams, lakes and other surface waters unless authorized by a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. NPDES permits contain operating restrictions that are necessary to protect public health and the environment. Illinois EPA is responsible for administering the NPDES program in Illinois.

What is the purpose of this NPDES permit?

This NPDES permit authorizes the discharge of treated wastewater from individual private sewage treatment facilities. The permit identifies the operating conditions and requirements that are necessary to prevent water pollution and safeguard the public health of families and communities. Since an unpermitted discharge to waters is a violation of the federal Clean Water Act, this permit provides a means by which certain surface discharging systems in Illinois can comply with the Clean Water Act.

Who is required to obtain authorization to discharge under this NPDES permit?

Homeowners and certain small business owners and operators utilizing surface discharging private sewage disposal systems will be eligible to operate under this permit. This permit is available to parties requiring permit authorization for both new installations and existing systems. Anyone owning such a system and meeting the eligibility criteria specified by the permit may apply for and receive authorization to operate under this permit. Only those parties that apply for coverage will receive permit authorization. No one will receive automatic authorization to discharge.

What is a surface discharging private sewage disposal system?

A surface discharging private sewage disposal system discharges treated wastewater, or effluent, directly onto the ground, into a collection tile, a natural drainage way, or a body of water, such that contaminants enter or have the potential to enter waters of the state.

Who uses a surface discharging private sewage disposal system?

Homeowners and small business owners and operators may use this type of system due to several limiting factors including sewer availability, soil permeability, lot size, high water tables and cost.



How is a surface discharging private sewage disposal system different from a subsurface (soil absorption) system?

A subsurface system disperses wastewater, or effluent, underground to an absorption field where it is distributed to the soil for treatment.

What is required by this NPDES permit?

This permit establishes system performance requirements through various pollutant limits, as well as sampling, inspection, maintenance and reporting requirements. The system must be inspected twice a year by qualified inspectors, licensed by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Samples must be collected twice a year to assure that the systems are treating sewage adequately and are meeting the various pollutant limits in the permit. In addition, the homeowner must furnish proof of an active maintenance agreement for the system to the IDPH or the local administrative authority. The purpose of the upcoming hearings is to seek comment from the public regarding the adequacy, sufficiency and appropriateness of the terms and conditions contained in the draft permit.

Why is this permit still a draft?

The Agency must follow certain legal requirements before issuing this final NPDES permit, including accepting public comments and holding public hearings. In addition, U.S. EPA must approve this permit before it can be implemented.

Is there a time limit to obtain authorization to discharge under this NPDES permit?

The requirement to obtain permit coverage for surface discharging private sewage disposal systems is preexisting and ongoing. However, at the present time, the Illinois EPA will be primarily focusing on processing permits for new installations and existing systems undergoing major renovations. Processing of permits for homeowners and small business owners or operators with existing systems will be phased in at a later date.

Does this NPDES permit require Illinois legislative approval?

No. The Illinois EPA has existing authority given to it by the Illinois General Assembly under the Illinois Environmental Protection Act to develop and issue NPDES permits according to regulations established by the Illinois Pollution Control Board.

How long does the authorization to discharge under this NPDES permit last?

The conditions and requirements in this NPDES permit will be reviewed and possibly updated by Illinois EPA every five years. The authorization to discharge will automatically renew when the state permit is renewed, as long as the private sewage disposal system is owned by the same person.

Is there a cost for coverage under this permit?

No.

What are the costs associated with sampling and maintenance?

The average estimated cost of a maintenance agreement is \$200 per year and the average estimated cost of sampling is \$200 per year.

My system will be inspected and approved by my local health department. Do I still need to obtain the NPDES permit authorization?

Yes. The local health department is checking to be sure the system complies with construction requirements. The NPDES permit focuses on operating and maintenance requirements to prevent water pollution.

How will this permit affect existing local or county ordinances?

This permit is intended to provide citizens of Illinois the ability to meet federal Clean Water Act requirements for discharge into public waters. It does not replace or alter other state and local regulatory requirements. Installation permits required under state law and local ordinance still must be secured from the appropriate authorized health departments.

How do I obtain coverage under the NPDES permit?

Once the permit goes into effect, a simplified application commonly referred to as a Notice of Intent (NOI) form may be acquired from Illinois EPA. Each applicant must complete and submit the NOI form to Illinois EPA. For new construction, the form will be filed with the Illinois EPA when the construction permit application has been reviewed by the authorized health department.

What happens to my NOI after it is filed with the Illinois EPA?

Once the NOI is filed with the Illinois EPA, the application will be reviewed to verify eligibility under the permit. Federal regulations require that a brief notification period occur prior to issuing coverage. To satisfy this requirement, the Agency will publish the NOI on its website.

Are there any parts of the state that are more likely to be affected by these requirements?

All requirements of the permit will apply equally to each system that has been granted permit coverage. Some parts of the state may have substantially more or fewer facilities covered by the permit, but all permitted systems are subject to all provisions of the permit. In the northern part of the state, high groundwater tables and soil conditions are not favorable for subsurface discharging systems. In the southern part of the state, the geology and low permeability of the soils are not favorable for subsurface discharging systems.

What are public health concerns associated with surface discharging private sewage disposal systems?

The wastewater, or effluent, discharged by a surface discharging private sewage disposal system may pond and become a tempting “playground” for children and pets that could become directly infected or become the transmitters of diseases such as gastroenteritis, shigellosis, salmonella, hepatitis A and leptospirosis. In addition, wastewater, or effluent, discharged by a failing surface discharging private sewage disposal system may create stagnant pools of water containing high levels of organic material that are favored breeding areas for mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus.

What are environmental concerns associated with surface discharging private sewage disposal systems?

Failing surface discharging private sewage disposal systems discharge minimally-treated or untreated sewage, along with disease causing organisms it may contain, directly to the ground surface or directly into a creek or lake. In addition to the previously-mentioned public health risks, improperly treated sewage is also detrimental to aquatic life and ecological conditions of streams and lakes.

What are other states doing about this issue?

Of the other U.S. EPA Region 5 states, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin prohibit surface discharging systems and Indiana allows them in only one county. Ohio allows surface discharging private sewage disposal systems and is developing an NPDES permit program for them.

When will Illinois EPA send the proposed NPDES permit to U.S. EPA for approval and when will it become effective?

The Agency will hold three public hearings on the draft NPDES permit during January 2007 and the hearing record will remain open until February 13, 2007. The Agency will then review oral testimony and written comments received from the public, make changes to the permit as necessary and prepare the required responsiveness summary. Due to the interest in this permit, many comments are expected, which will require sufficient time to review and to prepare responses. The proposed final NPDES permit would then be sent to U. S. EPA for concurrence. Illinois EPA cannot predict how long U.S. EPA will need to review and comment on the draft permit. Based upon the recommendations from U.S. EPA, it may be necessary for Illinois EPA to revise the permit before it can become effective.

Is there information on the internet about this NPDES permit?

This fact sheet and other information will be posted on the Agency website.

For more information on the NPDES program, visit the Illinois EPA website at <http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/permits/waste-water/index.html>

If you need additional information please contact:

Status of permit:	Landon Niedringhaus	217-782 0610
Public hearings:	Thomas Andryk.....	217-782-5544
Media inquiries:	Maggie Carson	217-558-1536
Legal questions:	James Day	217-782 5544