



Getting a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit

What is the purpose of this permit?

When we talk about NPDES permits, we're really talking about a family of permits. One branch is designed to deal with stormwater runoff. A second branch — the subject of this fact sheet — focuses on discharges from city (domestic) and industrial wastewater treatment systems.

Essentially, all NPDES permits allow discharges within acceptable limits. The limits are designed to protect streams and lakes. NPDES permits allow businesses to discharge a range of waste pollutants into rivers, streams, and lakes in ways that minimize the potential for harm to fish and other aquatic life and to humans who use the water for drinking, fishing, recreation and other purposes. Scientists working for the federal and state government have determined acceptable limits for potentially harmful substances that may be discharged through chemical waste, sewage, cooling water, and other forms of pollution generated by businesses and municipalities.

Who issues this permit?

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) administers NPDES permits within South Carolina. DHEC has been authorized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to manage the NPDES permitting process to satisfy both state and federal laws.

What types of business need to obtain this permit?

Manufacturing operations, car washes, auto salvage yards, wastewater treatment plants, utility companies, mining operations, petroleum storage facilities, aquaculture operations, and hydrostatic testing operations are just a few of the businesses that need NPDES permits to operate.

There are two sub-categories of NPDES permits:

- **General NPDES permit:** Each general permit applies to a particular type of activity or business. There is a general permit for car washes, for instance. DHEC administers about a dozen general permits in all. If your business/activity fits into one of our general permit categories, you can apply for this type of NPDES permit. The process of applying for this type of permit is relatively easy and quick. Applicants are, in effect, registering to be included under an existing (previously approved) general permit.
- **Individual NPDES permit:** Businesses/activities that do not fit into one of the general categories must apply for an individual NPDES permit. Getting an individual NPDES permit is a more time-consuming and expensive process than getting a general permit. All individual permits require a public notice/public comment period, which gives the public a voice in the permitting process. The public notice/public comment period begins after DHEC staff have crafted a site-specific draft permit decision.

How much will it cost to get an NPDES permit?

There is no application fee for a NPDES permit, but DHEC does assess yearly operational fees.

- A general NPDES permit costs \$75-\$100 each year.
- An individual NPDES permit costs from \$530 to a couple of thousand dollars yearly, depending on the design flow, the volume of discharge, number of discharge pipes, and other factors.

Where can I get the application form(s) for this permit?

You can download permit application forms from our website at www.scdhec.gov/environment/admin/htm/EQC_forms.asp#Water. Depending on the



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characteristics of waste your business will discharge and other factors, you may need to complete more than one form as part of your application packet. To make sure you complete all the necessary forms first time around, we urge you to speak to a DHEC permitting expert by phone or in person in the earliest stages of your planning process.

Generally, applications for industries are quite different from those for municipal (domestic) dischargers.

What, if anything, do I need to include with my application form(s)?

Each situation is different. Some applicants will need to submit an engineering report. Some will need to submit an 'alternatives analysis' demonstrating that discharging pollutants into surface water is the only option realistically available (part of an anti-degradation analysis). We strongly urge you to discuss your specific situation with a DHEC permitting expert early in your planning process to determine exactly what you'll need to submit.

What factors will come into play in DHEC's decision about whether to grant my business/facility a permit?

There are so many variables that can affect whether or not DHEC will grant an individual NPDES permit that two similar industries may apply for the same permit but get different outcomes depending on the discharge location. Each applicant for an individual permit must undergo a case-specific review. Factors affecting the timing of the permit process that may come into play include public sentiment/concerns about your activity, the existing quality of the water in the river, lake or stream that will be affected, the impact your activity could have on endangered species, coastal zone rules (if you are in one of the 8 coastal counties), and EPA opinions, among other things.

How long will it take to review and approve my application?

This is a tough question to answer with or without knowing project details. General NPDES permits take much less time than individual NPDES permits.

- **For general NPDES permits**, we usually complete our staff review process within a couple of weeks once we receive the completed paperwork and documentation that allow us to grant coverage to your business under the general permit. Of course, if you fail to submit all required documentation at the beginning of the process, the review/approval process will take longer.
- **For individual NPDES permits**, our goal is to complete our staff review and approval process (which includes an EPA review and a public notice process) within 180 working days or less once we receive all the completed paperwork and documentation. Typically, though, individual permits take longer than 180 working days because applicants frequently need to provide additional information to DHEC. If you're applying for an individual permit, plan on at least 320 calendar days to obtain a permit decision from DHEC. As with the general permit, if you fail to submit all required documentation at the beginning of the application process, approvals can take longer.

Meeting with a DHEC permitting expert early in your planning process will pay off big by helping you avoid delays.

Where do I submit my application?

Mail your application to:

- DHEC Bureau of Water
Water Facilities Permitting Division
Columbia, South Carolina 29201



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How long is my permit valid?

An NPDES permit is good for 5 years. As for renewals, as long as you file a complete application to renew your permit at least 180 days in advance of the expiration date, state law allows you to continue operations without disruption.

What is the appeal process for being turned down for a permit or having my permit revoked?

For information on the permit appeals process, visit our website at <http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/appeal-procedure-notice.htm>. Be aware that third parties also have the right to file an appeal and challenge DHEC's permit decision.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this permit or the application process?

- **Municipal/domestic systems:**
Call Mike Montebello at (803) 898-4228 or email him at Mike.Montebello@dhec.sc.gov.
- **Industry systems:**
Call Crystal Rippy at (803) 898-3964 or email her at Crystal.Rippy@dhec.sc.gov.

Where does the legal authority for this permit come from?

The authority for NPDES permits stems from federal and state laws. Our state environmental laws are written to be consistent with at least the standards set by federal laws.

DHEC's fee structure is authorized by a separate law.

- Federal Clean Water Act
(www.epa.gov/lawsregs/laws/cwa.html)
- S.C. Pollution Control Act
(www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/laws.htm)
- S.C. Environmental Protection Fund Act
(www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/laws.htm)

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