

# NPDES Permit Writers' Manual

December 1996

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**Cover Photo:**  
*Lower Yellowstone Falls  
Yellowstone National Park  
Photograph by Dave Hair*

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## Foreword

Since its establishment in the 1972 amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Program has achieved significant reductions in pollutant discharges, which in turn has resulted in tremendous improvement to the quality of our Nation's water resources. As we move into the 21st century, the objective of the national program will not only be to develop solutions which address remaining impacts to surface waters, but to do so in ways that continue to improve the effectiveness of the NPDES Program and allow us to measure environmental progress and results.

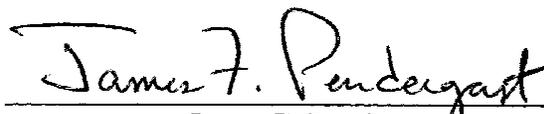
As EPA and States take steps to improve the NPDES Program and how it is implemented, it is essential that all parties involved understand the fundamental basis of the NPDES Program. The NPDES Permit Writers' Manual is principally designed to help permit writers prepare legally defensible and enforceable NPDES permits. Its purpose is to serve as a useful resource in providing the technical and legal considerations which support the development of NPDES permits. However, the manual is also intended to serve as a resource for others, including stakeholders and the regulated community, interested in the NPDES permitting process. Only after reaching some common level of understanding of the NPDES Program and the issues surrounding the permitting process, can EPA, State permitting authorities, and stakeholders develop optimal solutions to improve the quality of our surface water resources. To that end, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the changes taking place within the NPDES Program:

- ***Stakeholder Involvement and Public Participation***—EPA is committed to getting permittees and other interested parties involved at an early stage of the permit development and decision making process. For example, several NPDES authorities involve permittees and stakeholders in the permit development phase before the public notice process. This early involvement provides an opportunity for the permitting authorities, permittees and stakeholders to identify errors, address questions and develop optimal solutions.
  - ***Watershed Approach***—The Watershed Approach is EPA's renewed emphasis to address all stressors within a hydrologically defined drainage basin instead of viewing individual pollutant sources in isolation of other stressors. The watershed approach allows us to recognize that the health of our water resources are the result of complex interactions of various pollution sources, habitat conditions, flow and many other factors. EPA believes that these problems are best addressed through the development of watershed plans that integrate controls of point and nonpoint sources and provide decision-makers with an opportunity to consider issues such as
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protection and restoration of habitats, drinking water sources, ground water protection and other environmental and social objectives. EPA strongly encourages innovative approaches that implement NPDES requirements in ways that achieve greater environmental results at the least cost.

- **Refining of Point Source Focus**—As we place greater emphasis on environmental results we realize that certain sources of pollution may require increased national attention to achieve local watershed goals. EPA is actively engaged with States, environmental groups and the regulated community to address pollution problems from wet weather sources (CSOs, storm water and sanitary sewer overflows), mining operations, concentrated animal feeding operations and other key point sources where substantial pollution reduction may be possible. EPA is confident that involving stakeholders in the development of solutions for these remaining sources of pollution will provide optimal solutions.
- **Burden Reduction**—EPA is also pursuing regulatory reforms to eliminate unnecessary regulations and to reduce administrative burdens. For example, in June 1995, EPA promulgated a rule to eliminate obsolete rules. In 1996, EPA finalized national guidance on ways to reduce reporting and monitoring for permittees that have good historical compliance records.

As we move forward, we will continue to explore ways to promote watershed, streamlining, and reinvention concepts discussed above to facilitate the continual evolution and success of the NPDES Program. As such, this manual is expected to be revised periodically to reflect improvements, regulatory changes, and policy decisions. Thank you for using this permit writers' guide. We hope that it serves as a valuable resource and tool for helping to achieve healthy water resources throughout the Nation.

  
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