



Final NPDES Electronic Reporting Rule

On 24 September 2015, Administrator Gina McCarthy signed the final National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Electronic Reporting Rule for publication in the Federal Register. The publication of this rule is the latest step in an extensive multi-year outreach effort with EPA's state, tribal and territorial partners. This rule will replace most paper-based Clean Water Act (CWA) NPDES permitting and compliance monitoring reporting requirements with electronic reporting.

Purpose of the Final Rule

This final rule is designed to save authorized state, tribe, or territorial NPDES programs considerable resources, make reporting easier for NPDES-regulated entities, streamline permit renewals, ensure full exchange of basic NPDES permit data between states and EPA, improve environmental decision-making, and better protect human health and the environment.

This final rule requires that NPDES regulated entities electronically submit the following permit and compliance monitoring information instead of using paper reports:

- Discharge Monitoring Reports (DMRs);
- Notices of Intent to discharge in compliance with a general permit; and
- Program reports.

Authorized NPDES programs will also electronically submit NPDES program data to EPA to ensure that there is consistent and complete reporting nationwide, and to expedite the collection and processing of the data, thereby making it more accurate and timely. Importantly, while the rule changes the method by which information is provided (i.e., electronic rather than paper-based), it does not increase the amount of information required from NPDES regulated entities facilities under existing regulations.

Overview of Benefits

EPA anticipates that the final rule will save significant resources for states, tribes, and territories as well as EPA and NPDES permittees, while resulting in a more complete, accurate, and nationally-consistent set of data about the NPDES program. With full implementation (5 years after the effective date), the anticipated savings are:

- Authorized State NPDES programs: \$22.6 million annually,
- NPDES regulated entities: \$0.5 million annually, and
- EPA: \$1.2 million annually.

As an example demonstrating the benefits of electronic reporting is the State of Ohio's electronic reporting program for Discharge Monitoring Reports, which has a 99.9 percent adoption rate. This program has increased data quality and improved environmental protection, while also saving significant time and resources (e.g., Ohio was able to shift resources from five full-time staff to less than one to support the DMR program). The benefits of this final rule should allow NPDES-authorized programs in states, tribes, and territories to shift precious resources from data management activities to those more targeted to solving water quality issues.

Separate from this rulemaking, to promote transparency and accountability, EPA intends to make this more complete set of data available to the public, providing communities and citizens with information on facility and government performance. This can serve to elevate the importance of permitting and compliance information and environmental performance within regulated entities, providing opportunities for them to quickly address any potential environmental problems.

The final rule will also lighten the reporting burden currently placed on the states. Upon successful implementation, the final rule would provide states with regulatory relief from reporting associated with the Quarterly Non-Compliance Report, the Annual Non-Compliance Report, the Semi-Annual Statistical Summary Report, and the biosolids information required to be submitted to EPA annually by states.

Implementation

EPA will phase in the requirements of the rule over a five year period following the effective date of the final rule.

Phase 1 – One year after effective date of final rule

In Phase 1, EPA will begin to electronically receive information from authorized states, tribes, and territories regarding inspections, violation determinations, and enforcement actions. EPA, states, tribes, and territories will electronically receive Discharge Monitoring Report (DMR) information from NPDES permittees – the largest volume of data for the NPDES program. Also included in Phase 1 are the Sewage Sludge/Biosolids Annual Program Reports for the 42 states where EPA implements the Federal Biosolids Program.

Additionally, one year after the effective date of the final rule, authorized NPDES programs will submit an implementation plan for meeting the Phase 2 data requirements for EPA to review.

Phase 2—Five years after effective date of final rule

For Phase 2, EPA and authorized state NPDES programs have five years to begin electronically collecting, managing, and sharing the remaining set of NPDES program information. This information includes: general permit reports (e.g. Notice of Intent to be covered (NOI); Notice of Termination (NOT); No Exposure Certification (NOE); Low Erosivity Waiver and Other Waivers from Stormwater Controls (LEW)); Sewage Sludge/Biosolids Annual Program Report (where the state is

the authorized NPDES biosolids program); and all other remaining NPDES program reports. These program reports include:

- Sewage Sludge/Biosolids Annual Program Reports [40 CFR 503] (for the 8 states that implement the Federal Biosolids Program)
- Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Annual Program Reports [40 CFR 122.42(e)(4)]
- Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Program Reports [40 CFR 122.34(g)(3) and 122.42(c)]
- Pretreatment Program Reports [40 CFR 403.12(i)]
- Significant Industrial User Compliance Reports in Municipalities Without Approved Pretreatment Programs [40 CFR 403.12(e) and (h)]
- Sewer Overflow/Bypass Event Reports [40 CFR 122.41(l)(4), (l)(6) and (7), (m)(3)]
- CWA Section 316(b) Annual Reports [40 CFR 125 Subpart J]

How the final rule addresses comments

In response to concerns about implementation raised during the comment periods, the final rule provides authorized NPDES programs more flexibility to implement the final rule by providing them up to three additional years to electronically collect, manage, and share their data. Authorized NPDES Programs will also have more flexibility in how they can grant electronic reporting waivers.

Further Information

For additional information, please contact Messrs. John Dombrowski, Director, Enforcement Targeting and Data Division (202-566-0742) or Carey A. Johnston (202-566-1014), Office of Compliance (mail code 2222A), Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC, 20460; e-mail addresses: dombrowski.john@epa.gov or johnston.carey@epa.gov.

Useful Final Rule Link:

Email sign up for outreach events

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USAEPAOECA/subscriber/new?>