

Proposed Rule: Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Meat and Poultry Products Point Source Category

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The United States Environmental Protection Agency is proposing to revise the wastewater discharge standards that apply to meat and poultry products facilities. EPA's proposal follows the latest science and applies the Agency's Clean Water Act authority to require reductions of nutrients and other pollutants in discharges from slaughterhouses and meat and poultry processing and rendering facilities into waterbodies and publicly owned treatment works (POTWs). The proposed rule would help protect the nation's vital water resources, which support safe drinking water, agriculture, industry, recreation activities, and thriving communities, through the implementation of affordable and available wastewater treatment technologies.

Why are the discharge standards needed?

Meat and Poultry Products (MPP) facilities discharge pollutants into the nation's waters and to POTWs. Pollutants found in MPP wastewater include oil and grease, organic material, salts, ammonia, and significant quantities of the nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. The MPP category is one of the largest sources of industrial nutrient pollution in the country. Nutrient pollution is a significant environmental challenge affecting ecosystems and communities across the country. Excessive nitrogen and phosphorus in surface water can lead to a variety of problems, including eutrophication and harmful algal blooms, which have negative impacts on human health and the environment. EPA estimates that the proposed regulation would reduce pollutants discharged through wastewater from MPP facilities by approximately 100 million pounds per year.

What are Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards?

Under the Clean Water Act, EPA publishes Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards (ELGs), which are national industry-specific wastewater regulations based on the performance of demonstrated wastewater treatment technologies. These technology-based regulations are intended to represent the greatest pollutant reductions that are economically achievable for an entire industry. The Clean Water Act requires EPA to periodically review and, when warranted, revise the technology-based limits for industries to keep pace with innovations in treatment technology. As treatment technologies advance, revising the limits on which they're based locks in the advancements, leveling the playing field for the whole industry.

The MPP ELGs apply to facilities that slaughter and process livestock and poultry, perform rendering operations, and produce various products (e.g., steaks, ham, sausage, proteins for pet food). There are approximately 5,000 facilities in the U.S., most of which discharge wastewater indirectly via POTWs. EPA initially promulgated the MPP ELGs in 1974 and amended the regulation in 2004. In September 2021, EPA announced a rulemaking to revise the ELGs for the MPP industry based on information

suggesting that facilities could do more to control nutrients and other pollutants and that revisions could reduce discharges affecting environmental justice communities.

What is EPA proposing?

The proposed regulation contains three options. For existing facilities that discharge wastewater directly to waters of the U.S., EPA's preferred regulatory option would strengthen the effluent limitations established in the 1974 and 2004 rules by establishing more stringent effluent limitations for the control of nitrogen and, for the first time, effluent limitations on the discharge of phosphorus. The preferred regulatory option would also establish, for the first time, pretreatment standards for indirect discharging facilities to control the pollutants oil and grease, total suspended solids, and biochemical oxygen demand. The preferred regulatory option would apply to approximately 850 of the 5,000 MPP facilities nationwide.

The proposed regulation contains two additional options on which EPA is requesting public comment. These options would apply effluent limitations to additional direct discharging facilities and pretreatment standards to additional indirect discharging facilities. The two additional options would also establish pretreatment standards for nitrogen and phosphorus for some of the indirect discharging facilities included in the preferred option.

In addition to the three options, as part of the proposal, EPA is requesting comment on a provision that would require segregation and management of high-salt waste streams that are produced at some facilities, as well as the addition of E. coli bacteria as a regulated parameter for direct discharging facilities. For the options that include nutrient pretreatment standards for indirect dischargers, the proposal requests comment on a provision called conditional limitations. Should EPA decide to pursue nutrient pretreatment standards in a final rule, this provision would potentially eliminate redundant treatment by relying on nutrient treatment provided by the POTW that receives the MPP wastewater, potentially reducing compliance costs for some indirect discharging facilities.

How can I comment on the proposed regulation?

Upon publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register, EPA will accept written comments from the public for 60 days and will also offer two public hearings during that timeframe so that interested parties may provide oral comments. Visit EPA's [Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines 2024 Proposed Rule Web page](#) for more details, including how to provide written comments or register for the online public hearings.

Where can I find more information?

To access the Federal Register notices and supporting documents for the proposed rule, visit EPA's [Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines 2024 Proposed Rule Web Page](#). If you have questions, please contact Steve Whitlock at (202) 566-1541 or whitlock.steve@epa.gov.