

Introduction to wastewater permits

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) issues permits to wastewater treatment facilities that put limits on what can be in the water they discharge to lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater, and establish other requirements. Permits are regularly reviewed and updated as they expire, allowing the MPCA to incorporate new information and requirements. Permits are enforced through a combination of self-reporting (reports to the MPCA, U.S. EPA, or both) and compliance monitoring.



Types of permits

The MPCA is authorized to issue both NPDES/SDS and SDS permits, both of which can be either individual or general permits.

NPDES — National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is a federal program established under the Clean Water Act. The NPDES permit always regulates a treatment and disposal system that discharges a specified amount of a pollutant into a surface water. NPDES permits are administered by the MPCA through delegated authority from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

SDS — State Disposal System (SDS) is a Minnesota program that protects groundwater by regulating water discharges to the ground surface or subsurface.

NPDES/SDS — A permit that regulates discharges to both groundwater and surface waters.

Individual permits — A permit tailored to a specific facility or activity.

General permits — A permit that covers a group of facilities with similar activities and discharges (e.g., water treatment plants).

Major permits

- **Municipal/domestic** — Facilities with an average wet weather design flow of greater than or equal to 1 million gallons per day
- **Industrial** — Major discharges are based on points accumulated using the NPDES permit rating worksheet

Minor permits — All facilities not classified as major facilities

Steps to issuing a permit

1. Permit application — Permittee submits application to MPCA, and agency staff reviews it for completeness.
2. MPCA team reviews information to develop the permit
 - Technical review
 - Compliance review
 - Impaired waters/total maximum daily load (TMDL) review
 - Effluent limits review and recommendations (for NPDES/SDS permits only)
3. MPCA develops permit and supporting documents
 - Limits, monitoring, and reporting requirements
 - Special conditions: compliance schedule, plans to minimize pollutants, etc.
 - Standard permit conditions
 - Fact sheet or statement of basis
 - Antidegradation analysis may be completed for new or expanded discharges
4. Permit review before public notice — The MPCA sends the permit holder a draft copy of the permit to review before placing the permit on public notice.
5. Public notice — Interested parties may submit written comments, a request for a public informational meeting, or a petition for a contested case hearing. Comments received during this period may result in revisions to the draft permit.
6. Final permit issued and effective — Permits are issued for a period of five years (NPDES/SDS) or 10 years (SDS only). The permittee must apply for permit reissuance to continue coverage beyond the permit's expiration date.

Permit components

1. Cover page — Contains the name and location of the permittee, a statement authorizing the discharge, and lists the receiving water for which a discharge is authorized (NPDES/SDS permits)
2. Facility description — Includes a summary of the permitted activities and treatment processes
3. Map/location of facility and facility flow schematic, if available
4. Narrative permit conditions
 - Pre-established conditions that apply to all permits
 - Special conditions developed specific to the facility
5. Limit and monitoring requirements
 - Includes effluent discharge limits that limit the type, quantity, and concentration of pollutants that can be discharged safely, and the type and frequency of monitoring that is required to make sure that the facility is not exceeding those limits.