

NPDES; National Pollution Discharge Elimination System

By Mike Lucas, Wastewater Technician

Across the state we have many new operators so in this article I wanted to visit about your National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. This is your permit to discharge to the waters of the state from your treatment facility. It regulates the maximum contaminant levels (mcl), generally in mg/l, allowed in your final effluent and also the limits on the stream loading, generally in kg/d.

Many times I've found that the designated operator of the system does not have a current copy of the permit. It is fine to have a copy filed at the Clerk's office but the operator should certainly have access to one and be familiar with it. The permit not only defines the limits but also the sampling procedures. Is it a grab sample or a 24 hour composite sample? Some samples are required on an annual basis such as an annual influent sample which is most often required to be a 24 hour composite sample. Others are a once in the life of the permit sample such as toxicity. Controlled discharges from lagoons usually call for at least 2 grab samples. While reviewing one system's permit I did find an exception to that however. Their permit called for a 24 hour composite sample on their lagoon discharge. It was thought to have been an oversight by the permit writer but you are governed by that official permit.

As the designated operator you need to know that when your permit is being renewed the system will receive a draft permit and that you will have an opportunity to review it and to make comments. Be sure that you do that. There is a rule that does not allow a less stringent limit than was previously allowed on your permit. Think about it. Give credit to the NDEQ for their notification of changes to the permit. That wasn't always the case.

There are almost always changes to the limits, such as ammonia and what additional testing is required certainly now with nutrient issues. Your lab needs to be notified by your system of any additional required testing. Some laboratory results are "report only" on your discharge monitoring report (DMR) and some

have limits. Don't just assume that nothing has changed because, in fact, it probably has changed.

As the certified operator, the citizen owners of your system have invested heavily in your training and I sincerely hope that your valuable, knowledgeable voice is heard by the decision makers.