



# Briefsheet

## Managing Wastewater Discharge Permits

### Issue

The Washington State Department of Ecology is responsible for issuing wastewater discharge permits under the State Water Pollution Control Act (Chapter 90.48). Under the act, the Department of Ecology operates a state waste discharge permit program for discharges to ground and surface water, sewerage systems, and storm drains. Ecology also has authority to carry out provisions of the federal Clean Water Act. Ecology issues both State Water Pollution Control Act and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits.

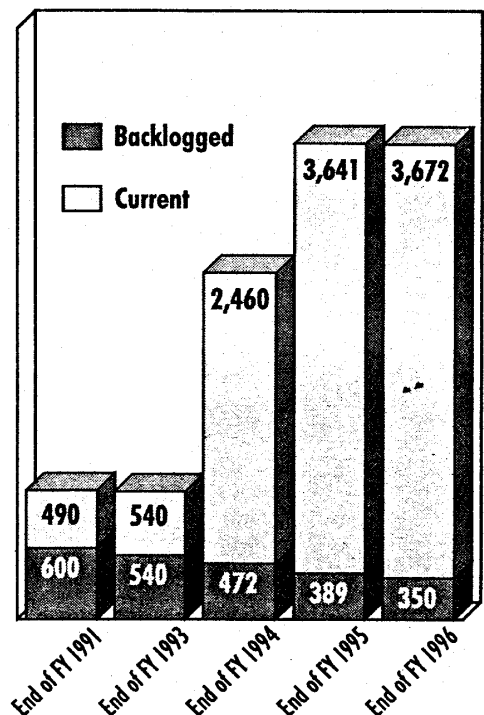
With the need to protect the waters of Washington state and to keep pace with the applications from new facilities, Ecology has issued more wastewater discharge permits. As a result, Ecology has a backlog of existing permits that need to be renewed. Ecology is making significant progress in reducing the backlog of permits.

### Background

In 1991, 55 percent of Ecology's wastewater discharge permits were classified as backlog permits. At the end of 1994, eleven percent of the wastewater discharge permits were classified as backlog. At the end of fiscal year 1996, nine percent of the wastewater discharge permits were classified as backlog. As of July 1996, Ecology managed 4,022 wastewater discharge permits.

### Current Situation and Future Outlook

The permit backlog is defined by extended individual permits, expired individual permits, and temporary individual permits. Individual permits are issued specifically for a facility for a five-year term. Expired individual permits are individual permits that reached the expiration date without any status change and Ecology is waiting for the facility to submit an updated application. Temporary individual permits are legal state permits to discharge according to the specifications contained in the facility's permit application rather than through a formal permit. Extended permits are legal permits to continue to discharge under the requirements in the previous permit. Permits are extended when the environmental risk is proportionally low in relationship to other facilities' permits and in order to accommodate the permit issuance cycle within the watershed management schedule.



Ecology will continue to update wastewater discharge permits based upon two criteria:

1. The permit's association with the highest environmental risks.
2. The permit's association with Ecology's watershed management approach to issuing wastewater discharge permits. Watershed management is a holistic approach to managing water quality in a drainage basin or area.

## **For more information**

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