

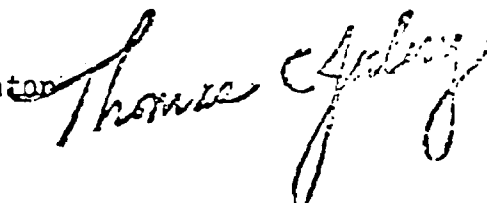
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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Agency Policy on Ammonia Criterion for Warm Water Fish Protection

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Recent information available to the Agency indicates that the ammonia criterion for warm water fish as contained in Quality Criteria for Water, 1976, may require adjustment. Thus, there is justification for a variance from such a criterion. It is recognized, however, that at the time it was published the ammonia criteria was representative of available data.

Research grants have been awarded to Dr. Robert V. Thurston, Montana State University, to study the ammonia problem. His research will include acute and chronic toxicity studies and should prove adequate to justify a revision of the ammonia criterion. It is estimated that such supporting data will be available in about a year.

In consideration of the above, it seems prudent that the Agency not take action to promulgate the Quality Criteria for Water, 1976, criterion for ammonia in State water quality standards until we have adequate data from which to revise that criterion. Thus the current ammonia criterion in Quality Criteria for Water would be excepted from the Agency policy for requiring State justification for a less restrictive number. Comments on an ammonia criterion in a State water quality standards submittal should, however, indicate that EPA is gathering additional data in support of an ammonia criterion. When such a criterion is published the State will be expected to seriously consider such a criterion in the next review of its water quality standards.

Your question of adequate scientific justification can include more than just a justification for an ammonia criterion. A criterion at variance with an appropriate criterion in Quality Criteria for Water could be justified for a water segment on the basis of existing natural water quality background for the constituent in question, on the basis of other existing water constituents which influence the toxicity of the constituent in question, or on the basis of existing fish or other aquatic species that require a less restrictive water quality for protection and propagation than those species used to derive the criterion in Quality Criteria for Water.

Where a State-recommended criterion cannot be technically justified, personnel in the Criteria and Standards Division of this office will be happy to work with you to arrive at one that is more appropriate. We also will assist in providing technical defense of any criterion for a State standard that is promulgated by EPA.

CONCURRENCES