

DEQ's Water Quality Program



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Background

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is responsible for protecting and improving Oregon's water. Investing in clean water will pay off for Oregon's economy and quality of life.

Oregon ranks as the tenth largest state with 96,981 square miles. Oregon has more than 100,000 miles of rivers, over 6,200 lakes (including many pure lakes in the Cascades Range), nine major estuaries, and about 360 coastal miles.

Groundwater is a less visible resource, but no less important. More than 95 percent of the available freshwater in the state resides underground in aquifers. Seventy percent of all Oregonians and more than 90 percent of rural residents rely on groundwater as their primary or secondary drinking water source. Groundwater also supplies the base flow for the state's rivers and streams.

DEQ's Water Quality Program

The program includes the Water Quality Division (at DEQ headquarters), water quality sections in three regions, and two monitoring sections at DEQ's laboratory.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency delegated authority to the DEQ to implement the federal Clean Water Act and parts of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act in Oregon. EPA oversees how DEQ carries out both laws and also has separate enforcement authority under these laws. Not all of DEQ's water quality programs are delegated under the Clean Water Act, and there are also many state laws that govern the protection of water quality.

Program responsibilities

Protecting Oregon's rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater quality keeps these waters safe for a multitude of beneficial uses such as drinking water, fish habitat, recreation and irrigation.

DEQ's Water Quality Program accomplishes this by:

- Developing clean water standards for Oregon's waters. In October 2008, the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission gave DEQ unanimous approval to pursue rule revisions that will set new water quality standards for toxic pollutants in Oregon. The new standards will be based on a new fish consumption rate that is much more protective of human health than the existing rate. DEQ has also started work to revise the turbidity standard, which sets limits on amount of sediment for state waters.
- Monitoring water quality with regular sampling of more than 50 rivers and streams in the 18 designated river basins found in Oregon. The monitoring program now includes toxic pollutant sampling of water and fish in the Willamette Basin.
- Regulating more than 200 sewage treatment systems and approximately 150 industrial dischargers through individual permits that set limits on pollutants discharged. In addition, approximately 1,800 facilities have general permits that limit discharges and more than 3,000 facilities are covered by stormwater general permits.
- Developing and implementing clean water plans (Total Maximum Daily Loads or TMDLs) for rivers and streams that do not meet clean water standards. DEQ is on track to meet a consent order target of 1,153 EPA-approved TMDLs by the end of 2010.
- Protecting groundwater by regulating pollution sources that apply treated wastewater to land or inject it into the ground.
- Protecting public health and the environment through permitting and inspecting septic systems and working with stakeholders to streamline the process.
- Helping communities implement plans to protect drinking water sources from contamination.
- Offering low-interest loans to public entities to help finance water quality improvement and wastewater projects.
- Providing grants and technical assistance to communities to reduce pollution from surface water runoff.
- Administering the certification program for domestic wastewater system operators.
- Issuing Clean Water Act certifications for "in-water" (such as dredging or altering wetlands) and hydroelectric projects.

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DEQ is a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon's air, land and water.

Alternative formats
Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696.

Beginning in July 2009, DEQ's Water Quality program will also be:

- Working with the Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife and others to develop an integrated water resources strategy for Oregon.
- Developing more tools for the water reuse program such as establishing a new permit program for reusing gray water outside of homes.
- Working with Oregon's 52 largest municipal waste water treatment plants to develop plans for reducing persistent pollutants in their effluent.
- Studying the impacts of sewage, gray water and hazardous material discharged from cruise ships.
- Developing watershed basin plans to assess water quality conditions that include monitoring and actions to address problems identified.

