

Oregon Administrative Rule

340-041-0059

Variations

This rule (OAR 340-041-0059) does not become applicable for purposes of ORS chapter 468B or the federal Clean Water Act unless and until EPA approves the provisions it identifies as water quality standards pursuant to 40 CFR 131.21 (4/27/2000).

(1) Applicability. Subject to the requirements and limitations set out in sections (2) through (7) below, a point source may request a water quality standards variance where it is demonstrated that the source cannot feasibly meet effluent limits sufficient to meet water quality standards. The director of the department will determine whether to issue a variance for a source covered by an existing NPDES permit. The commission will determine whether to issue a variance for a discharger that does not have a currently effective NPDES permit.

(a) The variance applies only to the specified point source permit and pollutant(s); the underlying water quality standard(s) otherwise remains in effect.

(b) The department or commission may not grant a variance if:

(A) The effluent limit sufficient to meet the underlying water quality standard can be attained by implementing technology-based effluent limits required under sections 301(b) and 306 of the federal Clean Water Act, and by implementing cost-effective and reasonable best management practices for nonpoint sources under the control of the discharger; or

(B) The variance would likely jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species listed under section 4 of the Endangered Species Act or result in the destruction or adverse modification of such species' critical habitat; or

(C) The conditions allowed by the variance would result in an unreasonable risk to human health; or

(D) A point source does not have a currently effective NPDES permit, unless the variance is necessary to:

(i) Prevent or mitigate a threat to public health or welfare;

(ii) Allow a water quality or habitat restoration project that may cause short term water quality standards exceedances, but will result in long term water quality or habitat improvement that enhances the support of aquatic life uses;

(iii) Provide benefits that outweigh the environmental costs of lowering water quality. This analysis is comparable to that required under the antidegradation regulation contained in OAR-041-0004(6)(b); or

(E) The information and demonstration submitted in accordance with section (4) below does not allow the department or commission to conclude that a condition in section (2) has been met.

(2) Conditions to Grant a Variance. Before the commission or department may grant a variance, it must determine that:

(a) No existing use will be impaired or removed as a result of granting the variance and

(b) Attaining the water quality standard during the term of the variance is not feasible for one or more of the following reasons:

(A) Naturally occurring pollutant concentrations prevent the attainment of the use;

(B) Natural, ephemeral, intermittent, or low flow conditions or water levels prevent the attainment of the use, unless these conditions may be compensated for by the discharge of sufficient volume of effluent discharges to enable uses to be met without violating state water conservation requirements;

(C) Human-caused conditions or sources of pollution prevent the attainment of the use and cannot be remedied or would cause more environmental damage to correct than to leave in place;

(D) Dams, diversions, or other types of hydrologic modifications preclude the attainment of the use, and it is not feasible to restore the waterbody to its original condition or to operate such modification in a way which would result in the attainment of the use;

(E) Physical conditions related to the natural features of the waterbody, such as the lack of a proper substrate, cover, flow, depth, pools, riffles, and unrelated to water quality preclude attainment of aquatic life protection uses; or

(F) Controls more stringent than those required by sections 301(b) and 306 of the federal Clean Water Act would result in substantial and widespread economic and social impact.

(3) Variance Duration.

(a) The duration of a variance must not exceed the term of the NPDES permit. If the permit is administratively extended, the permit effluent limits and any other requirements based on the variance and associated pollutant reduction plan will continue to be in effect during the period of the administrative extension. The department will give priority to NPDES permit renewals for permits containing variances and where a renewal application has been submitted to the director at least one hundred eighty days prior to the NPDES permit expiration date.

(b) When the duration of the variance is less than the term of a NPDES permit, the permittee must be in compliance with the specified effluent limitation sufficient to meet the underlying water quality standard upon the expiration of the variance.

(c) A variance is effective only after EPA approval. The effective date and duration of the variance will be specified in a NPDES permit or order of the commission or department.

(4) Variance Submittal Requirements. To request a variance, a permittee must submit the following information to the department:

(a) A demonstration that attaining the water quality standard for a specific pollutant is not feasible for the requested duration of the variance based on one or more of the conditions found in section (2)(b) of this rule;

(b) A description of treatment or alternative options considered to meet limits based on the applicable underlying water quality standard, and a description of why these options are not technically, economically, or otherwise feasible;

(c) Sufficient water quality data and analyses to characterize ambient and discharge water pollutant concentrations;

(d) Any cost-effective and reasonable best management practices for nonpoint sources under the control of the discharger that addresses the pollutant the variance is based upon;

(e) A proposed pollutant reduction plan that includes any actions to be taken by the permittee that would result in reasonable progress toward meeting the underlying water quality standard. Such actions may include proposed pollutant offsets or trading or other proposed pollutant reduction activities, and associated milestones for implementing these measures. Pollutant reduction plans will be tailored to address the specific circumstances of each facility and to the extent pollutant reduction can be achieved; and

(f) If the discharger is a publicly owned treatment works, a demonstration of the jurisdiction's legal authority (such as a sewer use ordinance) to regulate the pollutant for which the variance is sought. The jurisdiction's legal authority must be sufficient to control potential sources of that pollutant that discharge into the jurisdiction's sewer collection system.

(5) Variance Permit Conditions. Effluent limits in the discharger's permit will be based on the variance and not the underlying water quality standard, so long as the variance remains effective. The department must establish and incorporate into the discharger's NPDES permit all conditions necessary to implement and enforce an approved variance and associated pollutant reduction plan. The permit must include, at a minimum, the following requirements:

(a) An interim concentration based permit limit or requirement representing the best achievable effluent quality based on discharge monitoring data and that is no less stringent than that achieved under the previous permit. For a new discharger, the permit limit will be calculated based on best achievable technology;

(b) A requirement to implement any pollutant reduction actions approved as part of a pollutant reduction plan submitted in accordance with section (4)(e) above and to make reasonable progress toward attaining the underlying water quality standard(s);

(c) Any studies, effluent monitoring, or other monitoring necessary to ensure compliance with the conditions of the variance; and

(d) An annual progress report to the department describing the results of any required studies or monitoring during the reporting year and identifying any impediments to reaching any specific milestones stated in the variance.

(6) Public Notification Requirements.

(a) If the department proposes to grant a variance, it must provide public notice of the proposal and hold a public hearing. The public notice may be included in the public notification of a draft NPDES permit or other draft regulatory decision that would rely on the variance;

(b) The department will publish a list of all variances approved pursuant to this rule. Newly approved variances will be added to this list within 30 days of their effective date. The list will identify: the discharger; the underlying water quality standard addressed by the variance; the waters of the state to which the variance applies; the effective date and duration of the variance; the allowable pollutant effluent limit granted under the variance; and how to obtain additional information about the variance.

(7) Variance Renewals.

(a) A variance may be renewed if:

(A) The permittee makes a renewed demonstration pursuant to section (2) of this rule that attaining the water quality standard continues to be infeasible,

(B) The permittee submits any new or updated information pertaining to any of the requirements of section 4,

(C) The department determines that all conditions and requirements of the previous variance and actions contained in the pollutant reduction plan pursuant to section (5) have been met, unless reasons outside the control of the discharger prevented meeting any condition or requirement, and

(D) All other requirements of this rule have been met.

(b) A variance renewal must be approved by the department director and by EPA.

Stat. Auth.: ORS 468.020, 468B.010, 468B.020, 468B.035, 468B.110

Stats. Implemented: ORS 468B.048

Hist.: DEQ 10-2011, f. & cert. ef. 7-13-11