

Revised 700PM General Permit for Small-Scale, In-Water Mining

Background

DEQ regulates wastewater discharges from small-scale placer mining operations used to recover precious metals and minerals from streambed sediments via the 700PM National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System general permit. In the past five years, DEQ has registered an average of 1,370 suction dredge operators a year for coverage under this permit.

DEQ has issued a revised 700PM permit which will become effective on May 15, 2015. Anyone wishing to engage in any of the activities covered by the permit on or after May 15, 2015 must follow the terms of the revised permit. The revised permit reflects efforts to make small-scale, in-water mining less harmful to the environment.

How can I apply?

Anyone planning to suction dredge on or after May 15, 2015 needs to apply for the new permit and submit to DEQ the completed application form with non-refundable annual and surcharge fees.

Miners using non-motorized equipment will be required to meet the performance standards of the permit but aren't required to register or pay fees.

The permit and application form are available on DEQ's website:

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/wqpermit/mining.htm#700pm>.

How does placer mining affect water quality?

Placer mining can increase turbidity (reduce water clarity) in streams. Suction dredging and sluicing in streams that are already noted for water quality problems for toxics can disturb stream-bottom sediments and lead to the release of toxic pollutants into the water column.

What are the major changes in the revised permit?

This revised permit does not authorize discharges from suction dredges in every water body in the state. The permit does not cover discharges to:

- Water bodies listed as water quality limited on DEQ's impaired waters 303(d) list for sedimentation, turbidity and toxics other than chlorine unless a wasteload allocation in a total maximum daily load (pollution reduction plan) allows it;
- Tribal lands or water that constitutes a boundary with tribal lands

In addition, the revised 700PM permit also:

- Makes clear that the permit does not cover discharges in streams or rivers on or bordering tribal land. The previous permit did not clarify this policy.
- Cannot be assigned to discharges in water quality limited water for sedimentation, turbidity or toxics (other than chlorine). The previous 700PM permit authorized some discharges to water quality limited waters and included all toxics.
- Clarifies that discharges from highbanker and combination highbanker/suction dredge operations are not permitted.
- Still allows non-motorized tools to physically move boulders and large wood, but requires restoration of these habitat structures to their original position.
- Requires managing and containing petroleum products for dredge equipment to prevent a visible oily sheen in the water.
- Specifies best management practices for protection of mussels and Pacific lamprey larvae.
- Requires miners who operate dredges to display an identification number on a dredge.
- Requires annual submittal of a monitoring log to DEQ.

How much does the permit cost?

The nonrefundable annual fee for this permit is \$25. An additional nonrefundable surcharge fee of \$150 is required in calendar year 2015.

How did DEQ determine what requirements to put in the permit?

Various federal and state regulations apply depending on the activity, type and amount of wastewater discharged and location of the facility and receiving water. This permit includes appropriate monitoring and recordkeeping requirements to ensure compliance with these rules.



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An alternative format of this document can be made available. Call DEQ, Portland, at 503-229-5696, toll-free in OR at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696. Hearing impaired persons may call 711.

Turbidity is the pollutant of concern. Effluent limits and best management practices are included in this permit to protect water quality and beneficial uses of water such as swimming, fishing and drinking water.

What are known health effects or environmental impacts of turbidity?

Turbidity is a measure of the cloudiness of water. Excessive turbidity poses a threat to the survival of fish and other aquatic life by affecting their ability to see, feed and spawn. It can also clog gills. By reducing light penetration, high turbidity levels can disrupt the life cycle for some organisms, particularly bottom-dwelling species. For humans, high turbidity levels can interfere with disinfection of drinking water. Turbidity can also affect recreational uses of water.

Where can I get more information?

Jim Billings, compliance specialist, Portland, 503-229-5073 or toll-free in Oregon at 800-452-4011, ext. 5073.

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Beth Moore, general permit coordinator, Portland, 503-229-6402 or toll-free in Oregon at 800-452-4011, ext. 6402.

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Paper copies of the permit and fact sheet are also available at any of these DEQ offices:

Portland Headquarters Office

811 SW Sixth Ave.,
Portland, OR 97204

Pendleton Office

800 SE Emigrant, #330
Pendleton, OR 97801

Salem Office

4026 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, OR 97302

Eugene Office

165 E. Seventh Ave., Suite 100
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221 Stewart Ave., Suite 201
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