

AIR QUALITY PERMITS : READY FOR A CHANGE

January 24, 2018

Helena - The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is working to streamline the air quality permitting process for portable facilities, including crushers and screens, asphalt plants, and concrete batch plants. At the Annual Convention in January, staff from DEQ's Air Quality Bureau presented the framework of a possible new permitting process that will reduce permit approval times and allow operators to get to work more quickly.

Currently, when a permit application is submitted, DEQ performs a case-by-case analysis of the potential air emissions that would result from operation of the equipment at the proposed facility. Based on this analysis, the final air quality permit requires the operation of appropriate control technology to limit emissions. For example, at a gravel crushing facility, DEQ may require the operation of dust suppression controls like spray bars.

DEQ wants to change this process for portable facilities because the case-by-case analysis for these facilities almost always results in the same types of control requirements. In other words, the results of the analysis for any gravel crushing operation will be nearly identical, yet the process of coming to that conclusion and finalizing a permit can take up to three months. Considering that portable facilities make up more than half of all active Montana Air Quality Permits, simplifying the process could save a lot of time for both DEQ staff and for the companies that are required to get air quality permits.

DEQ is considering adopting a more efficient process that would require operators simply to register their equipment with DEQ prior to operation. The control requirements that are now included in air quality permits (such as spray bars, bag houses, or filters) as a result of case-by-case analysis, would instead be adopted into state rules that would apply to all portable facilities. By registering their equipment with DEQ, owners/operators would certify that operation of the equipment will comply with applicable rules and regulations. Registration would speed up the initial approval process and eliminate the sometimes-lengthy permit modification process.

DEQ has not finalized the new process and is reaching out to stakeholders for feedback and suggestions as details are worked out. Interested parties with experience in air quality permitting are invited to participate in a technical working group. Contact Rebecca Harbage at DEQ to comment or sign up for the working group: rharbage@mt.gov or (406) 444-1472.

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