

**FACT SHEET**

Strategy for Water Quality Standards and Criteria: Setting Priorities to Strengthen the Foundation for Protecting and Restoring the Nation's Waters

The Office of Science and Technology (OST) in USEPA's Office of Water is releasing the "Strategy for Water Quality Standards and Criteria: Setting Priorities to Strengthen the Foundation for Protecting and Restoring the Nation's Waters." Water quality standards and criteria are the foundation for a wide range of programs under the Clean Water Act. The strategy contains priority strategic actions that OST will undertake in collaboration with other EPA offices, states and authorized tribes over the next 6 years to strengthen and improve this foundation.

Background

The strategy is the product of a wide-ranging review of the existing water quality standards and criteria program within the context of all clean water programs. The review focused on clean water goals, mandates and authorities, and EPA's current strategic goals for clean water and other strategic planning efforts. The review also focused on major needs of the current EPA water quality standards and criteria program and key programs linked to it. These include water quality monitoring, total maximum daily loads (TMDLs), National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, nonpoint source programs, oceans and wetland programs, and source water protection. The review reflects the results of more than 50 listening sessions with over 350 people during April-September 2001 and recent recommendations from the National Research Council, the General Accounting Office, and EPA's Inspector General. The listening sessions included both in-person and telephone interviews with states, EPA program offices, and stakeholder groups.

What the strategy does and does not do

The strategy is intended solely as a planning document for OST. As described more fully in the strategy document, the strategy does not impose legally binding requirements on EPA, states, tribes or the regulated community. While we have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the discussion in the strategy regarding these requirements, the obligations of the regulated community are determined by statutes, regulations, or other legally binding requirements.

What are the expected outcomes from the strategy?

The actions in the strategy are designed to fill major program gaps to achieve critical environmental results. They include:

- Helping states strengthen water quality criteria for three pollutants (sedimentation, pathogens, and nutrients) that are responsible for an estimated 40 percent of water quality impairments nationally;
- Strengthening and maintaining the scientific foundation of water quality programs, including targeting criteria development for specific pollutants of highest importance;
- Clarifying for states how to implement key scientific and technical components of standards and criteria when regulating discharges;
- Establishing important technical and policy linkages between the water quality standards and criteria program and other programs such as those that protect drinking water and,

- Broadening participation in the water quality standards and criteria program with states and other stakeholders.

What are the strategic priority actions?

The strategy describes and sets milestones for the following ten strategic actions of highest priority:

- 1) Issue implementation guidance for the 1986 bacteria criteria for recreation.
- 2) Produce and implement a strategy for the development of pathogen criteria for drinking water and recreational use.
- 3) Produce and implement a strategy for the development of suspended and bedded sediment criteria.
- 4) Provide technical support to states and tribes for developing and adopting nutrient criteria and biological criteria.
- 5) Develop and apply a systematic selection process to produce new and revised water quality criteria for chemicals to address emerging needs.
- 6) Complete the national Endangered Species Act consultation with the federal Services on existing aquatic life criteria.
- 7) Provide technical support, outreach, training and workshops to assist states and tribes with designated uses, including use attainability analyses and tiered aquatic life uses.
- 8) Provide implementation support concerning technical issues affecting permits and TMDLs, beginning with technical support and outreach concerning the duration and frequency components of existing water quality criteria.
- 9) Identify any drinking-water source waters whose water quality standards do not protect the use, and work with EPA regions, states, and tribes to correct any deficient standards as soon as possible.
- 10) Develop a web-based clearinghouse for exchanging information on critical water quality standards issues, beginning with antidegradation.

How may I obtain a copy of the strategy?

A pdf version of the strategy is available for viewing and downloading from the OST web site at: www.epa.gov/waterscience/standards/strategy. Additionally, limited copies of the complete document entitled "*Strategy for Water Quality Standards and Criteria: Setting Priorities to Strengthen the Foundation for Protecting and Restoring the Nation's Waters*" are available from the address below. Please request document number EPA-823-R-03-010.

National Service Center for Environmental Publications
P.O. Box 42419
Cincinnati, Ohio 45242
1-800-490-9198
www.epa.gov/ncepihom/ordering.htm

How may I obtain more information?

For more information on the "*Strategy for Water Quality Standards and Criteria: Setting Priorities to Strengthen the Foundation for Protecting and Restoring the Nation's Waters*," please contact:

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