State Innovation Grant Program

Arizona:
Developing an Automated Permitting Process

The EPA State Innovation Grant Program was established in 2002 to help strengthen EPA's innovation partnerships with States and Tribes and is a direct result of the Agency's innovation strategy, *Innovating for Better Environmental Results: A Strategy to Guide the Next Generation of Innovation at EPA* (http://www.epa.gov/innovation/strategy). To support the *Innovation Strategy,* the 2002 grant program focused its efforts on projects that related to one of four priority issues: reducing greenhouse gases, reducing smog, improving water quality, and reducing the cost of drinking water or wastewater infrastructure. In addition, EPA sought projects that test incentives that motivate "beyond-compliance" environmental performance, or move whole sectors toward improved environmental performance. This series of fact sheets features the State projects selected for funding under the Grant Program.

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Smart NOI Website

http://az.gov/adeq/noi

Background

Arizona has a Construction Stormwater General Permit, designed to cover most construction activities, to protect the quality and beneficial uses of the State's surface water resources from polluted stormwater runoff. The permit requires operators to plan and implement appropriate pollution prevention and control practices for stormwater runoff during the construction period. These Best Management Practices (BMPs) are aimed primarily at controlling erosion and sediment transport, but also include controls, like good housekeeping practices, aimed at containing other pollutants such as construction chemicals and solid waste (e.g., litter). A key step in obtaining coverage under the general permit is submitting a Notice of Intent (NOI) to discharge storm water with specific project-related information. The NOI also serves as the operator's promise that they will comply with the permit conditions throughout the duration of the project.

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AZ Smart NOIs—Project Description

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) is developing "A Smart NOI" project, the goal of which is to create an automated decision matrix for managing the Arizona pollutant discharge elimination system (AZPDES). This Web-based system is known as the "Smart NOI," for notice of intent, which will help ease the challenge caused by a recent change to federal regulations that greatly expanded the number of construction projects that require permit coverage as part of an effort to reduce stormwater runoff pollution. The regulation, which took effect in March, requires operators of construction projects that disturb an acre or more of land to obtain prior authorization to discharging stormwater, increasing the number of permit applications in Arizona from about 2,000 to 10,000 per year. The goal is to reduce red tape and make this new federal permit requirement as user friendly as possible while protecting Arizona's environment. This "smart" Internet application is expected to reduce regulated community compliance costs through a more efficient permitting process. ADEQ officials believe this system will lead to improved water quality because the user-friendly system will increase industry compliance with State clean water regulations.

The NOI application process takes users through a series of questions that enables both applicants and Arizona DEQ officials to determine the level of attention each project needs. This online service provides an easy-to-use, GIS mapping and analysis tool to help applicants establish the latitude and longitude of proposed construction sites and their proximity to surface waters, including sensitive or impaired areas, by:

- allowing applicants to file for coverage, waiver, or terminate coverage under ADEQ's General Permit for stormwater discharges from construction sites;
- analyzing applicants' responses to rapidly identify those applicants who need to submit their Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs) to ADEQ for detailed project review;
- generating online records and receipts for applicants confirming transactions and determinations; and
- automatically store data, enabling ADEQ officials to track permit type, frequency, and project location.

This online application process automatically determines what level of permit coverage is needed. If more detailed review is necessary, the system will advise applicants of a delay in coverage and/or the need to submit a SWPPP to ADEQ.

Benefits of AZ Smart NOIs

The "Smart NOI" system enables permitees to more easily navigate the permit process by reducing paperwork and accelerating NOI review. The step-by-step, plain-language format ensures that applicants consider all pertinent information, which increases the accuracy of Agency records and reduces time needed to correct or amend applications. The electronic data management system (including the GIS-based analysis tool) provides preliminary answers to questions applicants might have about the timing and requirements for permit coverage required for a specific project. The GIS system ultimately serves as an analysis that improves water quality through a smarter, faster, permitting system.

Overall, Agency performance and productivity will significantly improve due to automated permitting at the customer level, reduced labor demands, increased accuracy of results, and improved availability of information. Further, this dramatic improvement in customer service makes the process less burdensome, resulting in an increased number of applicants. Those applicants will be more aware of their regulatory storm water requirements and better educated about issues related to erosion and sediment control at their job sites.

Project Plan for AZ Smart NOIs

ADEQ staff will prepare a detailed project plan and documents on requirements analysis and design, programming and equipment configurations, Web module testing, and deployment. The project runs from September 1, 2002 to September 30, 2003.

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