



1.3 Wastewater and Ambient Water Quality

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Applicability and Approach

This guideline applies to projects that have either direct or indirect discharge of process wastewater, wastewater from utility operations or stormwater to the environment. These guidelines are also applicable to industrial discharges to sanitary sewers that discharge to the environment without any treatment. Process wastewater may include contaminated wastewater from utility operations, stormwater, and sanitary sewage. It provides information on common techniques for wastewater management, water conservation, and reuse that can be applied to a wide range of industry sectors. This guideline is meant to be complemented by the industry-specific effluent guidelines presented in the Industry Sector Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) Guidelines. Projects with the potential to generate process wastewater, sanitary (domestic) sewage, or stormwater should incorporate the necessary precautions to avoid, minimize, and control adverse impacts to human health, safety, or the environment.

In the context of their overall ESHS management system, facilities should:

- Understand the quality, quantity, frequency and sources of liquid effluents in its installations. This includes knowledge about the locations, routes and integrity of internal drainage systems and discharge points
- Plan and implement the segregation of liquid effluents principally along industrial, utility, sanitary, and stormwater categories, in order to limit the volume of water requiring specialized treatment. Characteristics of individual streams may also be used for source segregation.
- Identify opportunities to prevent or reduce wastewater pollution through such measures as recycle/reuse within their facility, input substitution, or process modification (e.g. change of technology or operating conditions/modes).
- Assess compliance of their wastewater discharges with the applicable: (i) discharge standard (if the wastewater is discharged to a surface water or sewer), and (ii) water quality standard for a specific reuse (e.g. if the wastewater is reused for irrigation).

Additionally, the generation and discharge of wastewater of any type should be managed through a combination of:

- Water use efficiency to reduce the amount of wastewater generation
- Process modification, including waste minimization, and reducing the use of hazardous materials to reduce the load of pollutants requiring treatment
- If needed, application of wastewater treatment techniques to further reduce the load of contaminants prior to discharge, taking into consideration potential impacts of cross-media transfer of contaminants during treatment (e.g., from water to air or land)

When wastewater treatment is required prior to discharge, the level of treatment should be based on:

- Whether wastewater is being discharged to a sanitary sewer system, or to surface waters
- National and local standards as reflected in permit requirements and sewer system capacity to convey and treat wastewater if discharge is to sanitary sewer
- Assimilative capacity of the receiving water for the load of contaminant being discharged wastewater if discharge is to surface water
- Intended use of the receiving water body (e.g. as a source of drinking water, recreation, irrigation, navigation, or other)
- Presence of sensitive receptors (e.g., endangered species) or habitats
- Good International Industry Practice (GIIP) for the relevant industry sector

General Liquid Effluent Quality

Discharge to Surface Water

Discharges of process wastewater, sanitary wastewater, wastewater from utility operations or stormwater to surface water should not result in contaminant concentrations in excess of local ambient water quality criteria or, in the absence of local criteria, other sources of ambient water quality.³⁵ Receiving water use³⁶ and assimilative capacity³⁷, taking other sources of discharges to

³⁵ An example is the US EPA National Recommended Water Quality Criteria <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/criteria/wqcriteria.html>

³⁶ Examples of receiving water uses as may be designated by local authorities include: drinking water (with some level of treatment), recreation, aquaculture, irrigation, general aquatic life, ornamental, and navigation. Examples of health-based guideline values for receiving waters include World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for recreational use (http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/dwq/guidelines/en/index.html)

³⁷ The assimilative capacity of the receiving water body depends on numerous factors including, but not limited to, the total volume of water, flow rate, flushing rate of the water body and the loading of pollutants from other effluent sources in

the receiving water into consideration, should also influence the acceptable pollution loadings and effluent discharge quality. Additional considerations that should be included in the setting of project-specific performance levels for wastewater effluents include:

- Process wastewater treatment standards consistent with applicable Industry Sector EHS Guidelines. Projects for which there are no industry-specific guidelines should reference the effluent quality guidelines of an industry sector with suitably analogous processes and effluents;
- Compliance with national or local standards for sanitary wastewater discharges or, in their absence, the indicative guideline values applicable to sanitary wastewater discharges shown in Table 1.3.1 below;
- Temperature of wastewater prior to discharge does not result in an increase greater than 3°C of ambient temperature at the edge of a scientifically established mixing zone which takes into account ambient water quality, receiving water use and assimilative capacity among other considerations.

Discharge to Sanitary Sewer Systems

Discharges of industrial wastewater, sanitary wastewater, wastewater from utility operations or stormwater into public or private wastewater treatment systems should:

- Meet the pretreatment and monitoring requirements of the sewer treatment system into which it discharges.
- Not interfere, directly or indirectly, with the operation and maintenance of the collection and treatment systems, or pose a risk to worker health and safety, or adversely impact

the area or region. A seasonally representative baseline assessment of ambient water quality may be required for use with established scientific methods and mathematical models to estimate potential impact to the receiving water from an effluent source.

characteristics of residuals from wastewater treatment operations.

- Be discharged into municipal or centralized wastewater treatment systems that have adequate capacity to meet local regulatory requirements for treatment of wastewater generated from the project. Pretreatment of wastewater to meet regulatory requirements before discharge from the project site is required if the municipal or centralized wastewater treatment system receiving wastewater from the project does not have adequate capacity to maintain regulatory compliance.

Land Application of Treated Effluent

The quality of treated process wastewater, wastewater from utility operations or stormwater discharged on land, including wetlands, should be established based on local regulatory requirements.

Where land is used as part of the treatment system and the ultimate receptor is surface water, water quality guidelines for surface water discharges specific to the industry sector process should apply.³⁸ Potential impact on soil, groundwater, and surface water, in the context of protection, conservation and long term sustainability of water and land resources should be assessed when land is used as part of any wastewater treatment system.

Septic Systems

Septic systems are commonly used for treatment and disposal of domestic sanitary sewage in areas with no sewerage collection networks, Septic systems should only be used for treatment of sanitary sewage, and unsuitable for industrial wastewater treatment. When septic systems are the selected form of wastewater disposal and treatment, they should be:

- Properly designed and installed in accordance with local regulations and guidance to prevent any hazard to public health or contamination of land, surface or groundwater.
- Well maintained to allow effective operation.
- Installed in areas with sufficient soil percolation for the design wastewater loading rate.
- Installed in areas of stable soils that are nearly level, well drained, and permeable, with enough separation between the drain field and the groundwater table or other receiving waters.

Wastewater Management

Wastewater management includes water conservation, wastewater treatment, stormwater management, and wastewater and water quality monitoring.

Industrial Wastewater

Industrial wastewater generated from industrial operations includes process wastewater, wastewater from utility operations,, runoff from process and materials staging areas, and miscellaneous activities including wastewater from laboratories, equipment maintenance shops, etc.. The pollutants in an industrial wastewater may include acids or bases (exhibited as low or high pH), soluble organic chemicals causing depletion of dissolved oxygen, suspended solids, nutrients (phosphorus, nitrogen), heavy metals (e.g. cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury, nickel, zinc), cyanide, toxic organic chemicals, oily materials, and volatile materials. , as well as from thermal characteristics of the discharge (e.g., elevated temperature). Transfer of pollutants to another phase, such as air, soil, or the sub-surface, should be minimized through process and engineering controls.

Process Wastewater – – Examples of treatment approaches typically used in the treatment of industrial wastewater are summarized in Annex 1.3.1. While the choice of treatment

³⁸ Additional guidance on water quality considerations for land application is available in the WHO Guidelines for the Safe Use of Wastewater, Excreta and Greywater. Volume 2: Wastewater Use in Agriculture http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/wastewater/gsuweg2/en/index.html

technology is driven by wastewater characteristics, the actual performance of this technology depends largely on the adequacy of its design, equipment selection, as well as operation and maintenance of its installed facilities. Adequate resources are required for proper operation and maintenance of a treatment facility, and performance is strongly dependent on the technical ability and training of its operational staff. One or more treatment technologies may be used to achieve the desired discharge quality and to maintain consistent compliance with regulatory requirements. The design and operation of the selected wastewater treatment technologies should avoid uncontrolled air emissions of volatile chemicals from wastewaters. Residuals from industrial wastewater treatment operations should be disposed in compliance with local regulatory requirements, in the absence of which disposal has to be consistent with protection of public health and safety, and conservation and long term sustainability of water and land resources.

Wastewater from Utilities Operations - Utility operations such as cooling towers and demineralization systems may result in high rates of water consumption, as well as the potential release of high temperature water containing high dissolved solids, residues of biocides, residues of other cooling system anti-fouling agents, etc. Recommended water management strategies for utility operations include:

- Adoption of water conservation opportunities for facility cooling systems as provided in the Water Conservation section below;
- Use of heat recovery methods (also energy efficiency improvements) or other cooling methods to reduce the temperature of heated water prior to discharge to ensure the discharge water temperature does not result in an increase greater than 3°C of ambient temperature at the edge of a scientifically established mixing zone which takes into

account ambient water quality, receiving water use, potential receptors and assimilative capacity among other considerations;

- Minimizing use of antifouling and corrosion inhibiting chemicals by ensuring appropriate depth of water intake and use of screens. Least hazardous alternatives should be used with regards to toxicity, biodegradability, bioavailability, and bioaccumulation potential. Dose applied should accord with local regulatory requirements and manufacturer recommendations;
- Testing for residual biocides and other pollutants of concern should be conducted to determine the need for dose adjustments or treatment of cooling water prior to discharge.

Stormwater Management - Stormwater includes any surface runoff and flows resulting from precipitation, drainage or other sources. Typically stormwater runoff contains suspended sediments, metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), coliform, etc. Rapid runoff, even of uncontaminated stormwater, also degrades the quality of the receiving water by eroding stream beds and banks. In order to reduce the need for stormwater treatment, the following principles should be applied:

- Stormwater should be separated from process and sanitary wastewater streams in order to reduce the volume of wastewater to be treated prior to discharge
- Surface runoff from process areas or potential sources of contamination should be prevented
- Where this approach is not practical, runoff from process and storage areas should be segregated from potentially less contaminated runoff
- Runoff from areas without potential sources of contamination should be minimized (e.g. by minimizing the area of impermeable surfaces) and the peak discharge rate should

be reduced (e.g. by using vegetated swales and retention ponds);

- Where stormwater treatment is deemed necessary to protect the quality of receiving water bodies, priority should be given to managing and treating the first flush of stormwater runoff where the majority of potential contaminants tend to be present;
- When water quality criteria allow, stormwater should be managed as a resource, either for groundwater recharge or for meeting water needs at the facility;
- Oil water separators and grease traps should be installed and maintained as appropriate at refueling facilities, workshops, parking areas, fuel storage and containment areas.
- Sludge from stormwater catchments or collection and treatment systems may contain elevated levels of pollutants and should be disposed in compliance with local regulatory requirements, in the absence of which disposal has to be consistent with protection of public health and safety, and conservation and long term sustainability of water and land resources.

Sanitary Wastewater

Sanitary wastewater from industrial facilities may include effluents from domestic sewage, food service, and laundry facilities serving site employees. Miscellaneous wastewater from laboratories,

medical infirmaries, water softening etc. may also be discharged to the sanitary wastewater treatment system. Recommended sanitary wastewater management strategies include:

- Segregation of wastewater streams to ensure compatibility with selected treatment option (e.g. septic system which can only accept domestic sewage);
- Segregation and pretreatment of oil and grease containing effluents (e.g. use of a grease trap) prior to discharge into sewer systems;
- If sewage from the industrial facility is to be discharged to surface water, treatment to meet national or local standards for sanitary wastewater discharges or, in their absence, the indicative guideline values applicable to sanitary wastewater discharges shown in Table 1.3.1;
- If sewage from the industrial facility is to be discharged to either a septic system, or where land is used as part of the treatment system, treatment to meet applicable national or local standards for sanitary wastewater discharges is required.
- Sludge from sanitary wastewater treatment systems should be disposed in compliance with local regulatory requirements, in the absence of which disposal has to be consistent with protection of public health and safety, and conservation and long term sustainability of water and land resources.

Table 1.3.1 Indicative Values for Treated Sanitary Sewage Discharges^a

Pollutants	Units	Guideline Value
pH	pH	6 – 9
BOD	mg/l	30
COD	mg/l	125
Total nitrogen	mg/l	10
Total phosphorus	mg/l	2
Oil and grease	mg/l	10
Total suspended solids	mg/l	50
Total coliform bacteria	MPN ^b / 100 ml	400 ^a
Notes: ^a Not applicable to centralized, municipal, wastewater treatment systems which are included in EHS Guidelines for Water and Sanitation. ^b MPN = Most Probable Number		

Emissions from Wastewater Treatment Operations

Air emissions from wastewater treatment operations may include hydrogen sulfide, methane, ozone (in the case of ozone disinfection), volatile organic compounds (e.g., chloroform generated from chlorination activities and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from industrial wastewater), gaseous or volatile chemicals used for disinfection processes (e.g., chlorine and ammonia), and bioaerosols. Odors from treatment facilities can also be a nuisance to workers and the surrounding community. Recommendations for the management of emissions are presented in the Air Emissions and Ambient Air Quality section of this document and in the EHS Guidelines for Water and Sanitation.

Residuals from Wastewater Treatment Operations

Sludge from a waste treatment plant needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to establish whether it constitutes a hazardous

or a non-hazardous waste and managed accordingly as described in the Waste Management section of this document.

Occupational Health and Safety Issues in Wastewater Treatment Operations

Wastewater treatment facility operators may be exposed to physical, chemical, and biological hazards depending on the design of the facilities and the types of wastewater effluents managed. Examples of these hazards include the potential for trips and falls into tanks, confined space entries for maintenance operations, and inhalation of VOCs, bioaerosols, and methane, contact with pathogens and vectors, and use of potentially hazardous chemicals, including chlorine, sodium and calcium hypochlorite, and ammonia. Detailed recommendations for the management of occupational health and safety issues are presented in the relevant section of this document. Additional guidance specifically applicable to wastewater treatment systems is provided in the EHS Guidelines for Water and Sanitation.

Monitoring

A wastewater and water quality monitoring program with adequate resources and management oversight should be developed and implemented to meet the objective(s) of the monitoring program. The wastewater and water quality monitoring program should consider the following elements:

- *Monitoring parameters:* The parameters selected for monitoring should be indicative of the pollutants of concern from the process, and should include parameters that are regulated under compliance requirements;
- *Monitoring type and frequency:* Wastewater monitoring should take into consideration the discharge characteristics from the process over time. Monitoring of discharges from processes with batch manufacturing or seasonal process variations should take into consideration of time-dependent

variations in discharges and, therefore, is more complex than monitoring of continuous discharges. Effluents from highly variable processes may need to be sampled more frequently or through composite methods. Grab samples or, if automated equipment permits, composite samples may offer more insight on average concentrations of pollutants over a 24-hour period. Composite samplers may not be appropriate where analytes of concern are short-lived (e.g., quickly degraded or volatile).

- *Monitoring locations:* The monitoring location should be selected with the objective of providing representative monitoring data. Effluent sampling stations may be located at the final discharge, as well as at strategic upstream points prior to merging of different discharges. Process discharges should not be diluted prior or after treatment with the objective of meeting the discharge or ambient water quality standards.
- *Data quality:* Monitoring programs should apply internationally approved methods for sample collection, preservation and analysis. Sampling should be conducted by or under the supervision of trained individuals. Analysis should be conducted by entities permitted or certified for this purpose. Sampling and Analysis Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) plans should be prepared and implemented. QA/QC documentation should be included in monitoring reports.

Annex 1.3.1 - Examples of Industrial Wastewater Treatment Approaches

Pollutant/Parameter	Control Options / Principle	Common End of Pipe Control Technology
pH	Chemical, Equalization	Acid/Base addition, Flow equalization
Oil and Grease / TPH	Phase separation	Dissolved Air Floatation, oil water separator, grease trap
TSS - Settleable	Settling, Size Exclusion	Sedimentation basin, clarifier, centrifuge, screens
TSS - Non-Settleable	Floatation, Filtration - traditional and tangential	Dissolved air floatation, Multimedia filter, sand filter, fabric filter, ultrafiltration, microfiltration
Hi - BOD (> 2 Kg/m ³)	Biological - Anaerobic	Suspended growth, attached growth, hybrid
Lo - BOD (< 2 Kg/m ³)	Biological - Aerobic, Facultative	Suspended growth, attached growth, hybrid
COD - Non-Biodegradable	Oxidation, Adsorption, Size Exclusion	Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon, Membranes
Metals - Particulate and Soluble	Coagulation, flocculation, precipitation, size exclusion	Flash mix with settling, filtration - traditional and tangential
Inorganics / Non-metals	Coagulation, flocculation, precipitation, size exclusion, Oxidation, Adsorption	Flash mix with settling, filtration - traditional and tangential, Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon, Reverse Osmosis, Evaporation
Organics - VOCs and SVOCs	Biological - Aerobic, Anaerobic, Facultative; Adsorption, Oxidation	Biological : Suspended growth, attached growth, hybrid; Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon
Emissions – Odors and VOCs	Capture – Active or Passive; Biological; Adsorption, Oxidation	Biological : Attached growth; Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon
Nutrients	Biological Nutrient Removal, Chemical, Physical, Adsorption	Aerobic/Anoxic biological treatment, chemical hydrolysis and air stripping, chlorination, ion exchange
Color	Biological - Aerobic, Anaerobic, Facultative; Adsorption, Oxidation	Biological Aerobic, Chemical oxidation, Activated Carbon
Temperature	Evaporative Cooling	Surface Aerators, Flow Equalization
TDS	Concentration, Size Exclusion	Evaporation, crystallization, Reverse Osmosis
Active Ingredients/Emerging Contaminants	Adsorption, Oxidation, Size Exclusion, Concentration	Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon, Ion Exchange, Reverse Osmosis, Evaporation, Crystallization
Radionuclides	Adsorption, Size Exclusion, Concentration	Ion Exchange, Reverse Osmosis, Evaporation, Crystallization
Pathogens	Disinfection, Sterilization	Chlorine, Ozone, Peroxide, UV, Thermal
Toxicity	Adsorption, Oxidation, Size Exclusion, Concentration	Chemical oxidation, Thermal oxidation, Activated Carbon, Evaporation, crystallization, Reverse Osmosis