

## Researching Iowa Wastewater Permits

Steve Veysey, 8/10/00

Point-source dischargers (municipal and private sewage facilities, et cetera) are required to have federal NPDES permits. In Iowa, DNR is responsible for issuing the permits, verifying compliance, and initiating corrective action. An example would be the permit issued to the City of Garnavillo waste treatment facility which discharges into South Cedar Creek. Using the internet, it is now possible to obtain detailed information about any specific waste-water discharge permit issued in Iowa. I would like to thank DNR officials for helping me to figure it out. Here's how.

1) Go to the DNR website ([www.state.ia.us/government/dnr](http://www.state.ia.us/government/dnr)). From there, follow links to "Environmental Protection" -> "Wastewater Permit Holders" -> "Permit Listing in .xls File Format". This will download an Excel spreadsheet file containing the ownership, address, location, and receiving stream for every wastewater permit issued in Iowa. You are done with the DNR website.

2) Open the downloaded file in Excel. Each column in the spreadsheet can be independently searched. For example, move sideways to the "Receiving Stream" column. Click on the pull-down button in the field header, and scroll to and select the stream of interest. You will now be viewing a subset of the entire database showing only those permits discharging into the selected stream or river basin. Scroll sideways to the "EPA NPDES ID Number" column. Write down the ID numbers for the permits you would like to research. You are done with Excel.

3) Go to the EPA "Envirofacts" website ([www.epa.gov/enviro/index\\_java.html](http://www.epa.gov/enviro/index_java.html)). From there, follow links to "Queries of Maps and Reports" -> "Water Discharge Permits (PCS)". This opens the "Water Discharge Permits Query Form". In the first section, "Facility Selection", choose the scroll-down option "NPDES - partial or complete ID". On the next line, type in the ID number of the permit you are researching. (ie: for the City of Garnavillo permit, type in IA0026697). Ignoring the other sections, scroll to the very bottom of the page, and click on SEARCH. This will bring up the "PCS Query Results" page for the permitted facility.

4) Click on the permit number in the "NPDES ID" column (for this example, the number is IA0026697). This leads to the "PCS Detailed Reports" page. Check-mark the types of reports you want to view; the default is "all". Click on SEARCH. You should now be viewing a very lengthy and detailed report containing a complete permit history for the facility, and details of every monthly report for the current permit period. Many of the fields in the report are links to more detailed information. The report includes a list of the permit parameters (click the Yes field to see the parameter limits), the monthly measurements reported by the facility for each permit parameter, notations regarding parameter violations, reasons (excuses?) why some monthly reports are incomplete, and much, much, more.

It is possible to "save" the report to your computer, but the report is much wider than a single page, so I have been unsuccessful in getting a proper printout of the report directly from the website. Similarly, I have been unsuccessful in opening the downloaded report in Excel, Word, or Composer, so that it could be reformatted for proper printing. If you figure it out, please let me know. There is still a lot to be explored. For instance, "lagoon processing" seems to be used as a reason (excuse?) for often not reporting parameter values month after month. These entries never seem to be questioned, and always are flagged as "no violation". Why? Also, the reported "maximum measured" value for a parameter often exceeds the "maximum permit level" criterion many times over, but it is only when the "average measured" value exceeds the "average permit level" criterion that the entry is flagged as a "numeric violation". Why?

What does this all mean? It means we no longer have to rely upon individual DNR field officers to prepare summaries of violations for us for specific permits or water bodies. We can do it ourselves if we are willing to take the time to "learn the language". It means we can make a serious attempt to document poor performance or incomplete record keeping by a facility, the recorded violations at the facility, and the enforcement actions (or lack thereof) taken by DNR. We can also find out when permit renewals will occur, thereby enhancing our opportunity to submit comments to DNR or EPA.

