

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION**

**STAFF SUMMARY REPORT: Bill Johnson
MEETING DATE: March 12, 2025**

ITEM: 6

**Anatomy and Physiology of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
(NPDES) Permits – Informational Item**

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DISCUSSION

In 1972, Congress enacted the Federal Water Pollution Control Act amendments, which marked the beginning of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting program. The amendments established a goal of eliminating the discharge of pollutants into surface waters by 1985. While this goal remains elusive, the NPDES permitting program has taken steps toward it by establishing technology-based effluent limitations that reduce pollutants discharged to the maximum extent practicable. In cases where technology-based effluent limits are insufficient to protect water quality, the NPDES permitting program protects surface waters by establishing water quality-based effluent limits that ensure beneficial uses are protected. Over the past 50 years, the NPDES permitting program has largely been successful in reducing pollutants discharged to surface waters and helping to restore beneficial uses of adversely impacted receiving waters.

This informational item will explore the anatomy and physiology of NPDES permits, i.e., their structure and the functions of their various parts, and explain how the pieces work together to ensure that pollutant discharges are minimized and preserve water quality.