



Permitting reform

New accountability, capacity, and technology will speed the permitting process for businesses and local government while continuing to protect the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Statutory changes, **\$2.68 million** from the General Fund, and **\$1.5 million** from the Environmental Fund to improve permitting by:

- Hiring more permitting staff to address the current permit application backlog and a permitting ombudsperson to improve communication between parties
- Modifying how permitting efficiency is tracked when a permittee submits incomplete information
- Incentivizing timely responses from permit applicants
- Helping businesses identify environmental consultants with a record of good performance
- Exploring and piloting the use of artificial intelligence in permitting
- Allowing the MPCA to reduce the public comment period for public wastewater treatment facilities from 60 days to 30 days
- Allowing the MPCA to require air emission modeling, avoiding time-consuming delays

These legislative recommendations work in tandem with internal steps the MPCA is taking to improve permitting, including a permit dashboard pilot project for greater transparency.

Challenge

Regulated parties like builders, landfills, manufacturers, and wastewater treatment facilities require permits from the MPCA to comply with laws and protect the environment. Applying for and issuing permits is a complex and time-consuming process for regulated parties and the MPCA. A backlog in permit applications impacts some regulated parties, hindering important projects and economic activity.

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Why it's important

The MPCA cannot address these issues without additional resources and policy changes. Issuing final permits faster while maintaining accuracy and safeguards is good for businesses, communities, and our environment.

Who is impacted

Permit applicants and Minnesotans who rely on the permitting process for environmental protections will benefit from a more efficient and better-resourced process with greater accountability, flexibility, and better use of technology.

Administrative efforts to strengthen permit efficiency

Legislative action is part of a larger strategy for streamlining the permitting process. MPCA strives to continuously improve its programs and has already implemented a number of enhancements in its permitting processes. Some highlights include:

- **Upgrades to data modernization:** Since 2023, MPCA has been transitioning more of its permitting from paper to online applications, creating efficiencies for both the applicant and the agency.
- **Coordinated Project Plans (CPP):** Legislation passed in 2024 directed the agency to change its approach to certain aspects of the permitting process, including supporting CPPs. CPPs establish transparent timelines and coordinated work among state agencies for projects that require environmental review. The MPCA has implemented this legislation by creating an online, user-friendly CPP request form. Additionally, the agency is implementing some of the principles of CPP on other complex projects with success.
- **Permit application tracking pilot project:** MPCA is working to develop a new online tool that allows applicants and other interested parties to easily see the status of a permit application.
- **Permittee assistance:** MPCA has set up an inbox where permittees can send questions that arise around air permits and has developed a new calculation template to assist with the application.
- **More transparency on permitting efficiency:** In response to a report by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, MPCA modified its Permitting Efficiency Report to provide more detailed data that breaks down permit timeliness by media type, tier, and priority status.
- **Backlog project plan:** MPCA leaders are working on a continuous improvement project to identify the highest-priority solutions for addressing backlogged permits. The outcomes of this effort will help guide future administrative and/or legislative efforts.