

ENVIRONMENTAL PERMITTING

ISSUE

What legislation and regulatory changes will streamline and reduce the cost of the state's environmental permitting processes?

POLICY

Minnesota businesses statewide have expressed frustration and concern about the time required to process environmental permits. To maximize competitiveness in a global economy, companies seeking industrial permits – whether for existing, expanding or new facilities – must be assured of the clarity, timeliness, predictability and accountability of the environmental review and permitting process.

Minnesota Chamber members support legislation to improve the permitting process that includes the following:

- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) would not be required if a proposed project is already subjected to other environmental rules and regulations.
- Allows a project proposer to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement rather than the responsible governmental unit (RGU). The RGU would still review and approve the EIS.
- Allow construction but not operation of a project to begin before completion of a permit. Currently construction is not allowed to begin until a permit is granted.
- Requires that final decisions on permits must be made within 30 days of the final approval of an environmental impact statement rather than 90 days.
- Moves the appeal of ~~a granted permit~~ an environmental review decision from District Court to the Court of Appeals and requires a bond for any action challenging the ~~awarded permit decision~~.
- Reducing administrative costs by allowing permittee's to submit applications electronically and creating "templates" for frequent applications such as wastewater treatment plants and ethanol plants.
- Encouraging "one-stop shopping" for permits.
- Encourage state agencies to communicate better on permits that require inter agency approval.

BUSINESS IMPACT

Sensible environmental regulations allow Minnesota to maintain a clean environment and a healthy business climate while fostering economic development throughout the state. Companies need certainty in the regulatory process when expanding or starting a business. The current permitting process can be intimidating, confusing and costly. All costs and regulatory requirements are compared against other states. Permits must be received in months, not years, so businesses are encouraged to expand or locate to Minnesota. Minnesota businesses want an efficient, expedient regulatory environment, providing clarity, timeliness and predictability while maintaining a strong safety and environmental protection program.