



U.S. EPA Initiates Study on Nutrient Removal at Publicly Owned Treatment Works

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THE UNITED STATES Environmental Protection Agency wants to hear from you. Virginia publicly owned treatment works (POTWs) have been heavily involved with nutrient removal for several years. Now, you have an opportunity to share your knowledge and experience with the entire country.

In 2016 the EPA initiated a multi-phase study to showcase nutrient removal at POTWs. The goals of the study are to establish a nationwide baseline for nutrient removal at municipal wastewater treatment plants, and to characterize lower cost options, such as repurposing existing equipment or changing operation and management practices, that result in improved nutrient control. Currently, there are no comprehensive, nationwide data on nutrient discharges and removal at POTWs. To provide that information, EPA is making final preparations for the first phase of a study, an online interactive screening questionnaire. This form will collect basic information about nutrients from all facilities nationwide, focusing on treatment plant characteristics and technology in place.

The EPA is planning to distribute its electronic questionnaire later this year or in early 2019. POTW operators and plant managers should look for letters and emails from EPA providing information on how to participate in the survey. The survey is asking for general information. No samples or analysis will need to be taken, or run, for this survey. The EPA has been working with the National Rural Water Association, and other water trade associations, to provide a survey that requires a minimal amount of time and effort to complete.

Study Goals

Goal 1: Obtain nationwide data on nutrient removal to help set more realistic and achievable nutrient reduction targets.

Goal 2: Encourage improved POTW performance with less expense.

Goal 3: Provide a forum for stakeholders to share best practices.

Q: How will EPA collect this information?

A: EPA will use an interactive online screening questionnaire to collect the information. The questionnaire is tailored to minimize the number

of questions asked. For example, facilities with service populations under 750 individuals and average daily flows less than one million gallons per day will be asked the fewest number of questions. This should reduce the burden on facilities that have limited staff available.

Q: How will participation in the survey benefit my POTW?

A: The multi-phase study will:

- Help POTWs optimize nutrient removal by providing operation and performance information from similar types of POTWs that have already achieved cost-effective approaches to nutrient removal.
- Serve as a major new nationwide data resource on nutrient removal to help stakeholders evaluate and develop achievable reduction values.
- Provide a rich database of nutrient removal performance for POTWs, states, academic researchers and other interested parties.

Q: Will EPA use this information to develop stricter nutrient limitations or standards for POTWs?

A: No. EPA and various stakeholders will use this information to develop a national profile of POTWs and their nutrient discharges to develop, characterize, and research operation and management practices for improving nutrient reduction.

Additional information regarding the survey is at epa.gov/eg/national-study-nutrient-removal-and-secondary-technologies. Once the survey is initiated, EPA will have a helpline available to assist respondents in completing the questionnaire. If you have additional inquiries, please send them to nutrient-removal-study@epa.gov.

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