

PLEDGE and Air Use Permit Improvements

The PLEDGE (Promoting Leadership in Environmental Decision-Making to Grow our Economy) permit program is a two year pilot program designed to ensure timely issuance of environmentally sound air quality permits for major manufacturing facilities. Up to five projects per year will be considered eligible for the PLEDGE Program. The PLEDGE Program requires that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the permit applicant commit to processing a new source review permit application in a cooperative, transparent manner. Benefits of the program include the use of "project teams" to insure prompt review and turn around time, early involvement and education of the public, and greatly reduced permit processing time. Information requests and responses, independent technical reviews, and discussions of draft decisions will be conducted quickly and efficiently. PLEDGE will greatly reduce the time needed to obtain an air use permit to as little as 100 days and no more than 120 days.

With the development of PLEDGE, the DEQ, in collaboration with other affected parties, was able to conduct a reassessment of its existing air use permit process for all permit applicants. As a result of this effort, over the next four months, the DEQ will implement a redesigned process that will provide for early communication with companies before applications are submitted, more certainty for permit applicants, less wasted time for the applicant and the DEQ staff, and consequently reduced permit processing times. A key change that is common to both the PLEDGE Program and the improved air permit process will be an effort by both the DEQ and the applicants to address issues, set schedules, and answer questions in an upfront "scoping meeting" prior to application submittal. The integrity of applicable environmental requirements and standards is maintained throughout the improved process. The improved permit process is intended to provide the certainty of having permit decisions completed within 180 days of submittal for all applications.

The DEQ is presently accepting applications for PLEDGE Program projects. Additionally, the DEQ will begin implementation of the improved air permit process in four months or by September 2004. Both the PLEDGE Program and the new air use permit process are significant innovations in the DEQ air quality program that demonstrate the DEQ's commitment to protecting human health and the environment and to continuous improvement in public service.