

# PERMIT PROCESS

## Staff Contacts:

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**Background:** As part of the APCD's responsibility to meet state and federal clean air standards, the District issues permits that require compliance with air pollution regulations. The permit program gives the District the authority to specify operating conditions that minimize emissions, and it provides information on the type and amount of air pollution caused by businesses. This emissions database is invaluable for planning emission reduction strategies and tracking their progress. The permit program is designed to operate on a cost recovery basis so that the permit fees received sustain the administration of the program. Some of the businesses required to hold permits are power plants, refineries, oil fields, gas stations, dry cleaners, auto body shops, printers, and large boilers.

An APCD Permit is required before constructing, changing or operating any equipment that causes or controls air pollution; permits are also required prior to the transfer of ownership or relocation of an existing business. The APCD encourages pre-application meetings, and has distributed information about our requirements to all planning and building agencies in the county. State law requires each city and the county to give that information to building permit applicants so they are aware of air quality regulations early in the construction planning process. APCD rules, application forms, and information about requirements are available on the SLO APCD's Internet web page: <http://www.slocleanair.org/>

**Program Operation:** The permit application process begins with a staff evaluation of the project's ability to comply with federal, state, and local air quality regulations. An application is submitted to the APCD along with a description of the business operation and the equipment and materials to be used. If compliance is indicated after an engineering evaluation then an Authority to Construct (ATC) is issued. The ATC is required before construction begins to ensure that the proposed equipment will be able to comply with air quality regulations. Some applicants may qualify for a Startup Authorization, which is a permit streamlining measure that allows an ATC to be bypassed and a permit to be issued in the field.

Conditions of the ATC require the APCD to be notified after the construction or modification is complete. The ATC then serves as a temporary permit to allow businesses to test, calibrate, and demonstrate compliance with permit conditions included in the ATC. Following a successful startup inspection, the final Permit to Operate (PTO) is issued to allow the continued operation of the business in accordance with the permit conditions. Permits are renewed periodically and updated as necessary to ensure compliance and to reflect any changes in local, state, or federal requirements. Most permits are renewed annually, but smaller business types that are likely to stay in compliance may have longer permit renewal cycles. Several of our permit fee category schedules have small, medium and large tiers to encourage emission reductions.

**Example:** A permit may need to be modified if the process or equipment is altered, or if there are changes in the relevant regulations. Morro Bay Cabinets Application Number 3300 is a current example of a permit modification. This business was first issued an

APCD permit in 1997 for their coating operation. At that time the daily VOC emissions were limited to 25 pounds per day by Rule 204 Requirements, because compliance with Best Available Control Technology (BACT) had not been demonstrated.

Business has been increasing for Morro Bay Cabinets and emissions are now close to the 25 pound per day VOC limit. Application 3300 was submitted to increase that daily limit. Morro Bay Cabinets would have two options to meet the BACT requirement: (1) install 'back-end' control equipment or (2) switch to lower VOC coatings. Due to the high cost of control equipment, switching to alternative materials looks like the most feasible option. Application 3300 was placed on incomplete status while Morro Bay Cabinets tests different coatings. APCD staff have been assisting the applicant by explaining the compliance options and providing technical information about alternative materials and control equipment. At this time it looks like Morro Bay Cabinets will be able to switch to coatings with lower VOC contents and significantly reduce their emissions.

This example highlights the District's efforts in Business Assistance and Pollution Prevention. The rules adopted by the APCD Board have enabled significant emission reductions to be achieved. The challenge for the staff is to enforce the rules and achieve those emission reductions without negatively affecting businesses. It is the policy and practice of the APCD staff to work together with businesses to achieve emission reductions. An adversarial relationship is not effective or necessary. Most businesses are eager to investigate pollution prevention strategies that often reduce costs and improve the work environment. Working in an advisory mode, APCD staff has been a part of many Pollution Prevention success stories.

The administration of the APCD permit program involves science, economics, politics, and psychology. Each application is unique and the management of multiple projects with different construction timelines is challenging. The permit staff prides itself on its good customer service, detailed technical assistance, and its quick response to applications. Significant emission reductions have been realized through the permit program. Additional progress will only be achieved with the continued cooperation of the regulated businesses. The APCD staff works hard to cultivate this cooperation and to administer the permit program in a fair and efficient manner that doesn't negatively affect the business community.

**Vital Statistics:** There are currently 515 permits in force at 318 County facilities, and about 180 applications are received each year (many applications are for permit modifications). The goals for permit processing times are being met for all project categories: Authorities to Construct for small projects are averaging 6 days versus the 15 day goal; for medium size projects, 12 days versus 60 days; and for large size projects, 100 days versus 120 days.

**Staffing:** One supervising engineer – David Dixon. Four air pollution control engineers – Brian Aunger, Dean Carlson, Paul Reitz, Gary Willey. One-half clerical staff – Kim Johnson

**Other agencies involved:** APCD staff work closely with the Planning Departments to ensure that applicants for building permits are informed of air permitting requirements as specified in Government Code 65850.2. The County Environmental Health Department and the APCD have developed a combined application and Authority to Construct process for gasoline dispensing facilities as a permit streamlining measure.

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