Water Quality Standards Variances: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Slide Presentation Infographics

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The United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") developed and released a slide presentation and 10 infographics addressing water quality standards ("WQS") variances.

The slide presentation and infographics were developed by the following two EPA offices:

- Office of Science and Technology
- Office of Water

The stated purpose of these documents includes:

- Purpose and value of WQS and designated use variances
- Opportunities for public engagement during the regulatory process

The Clean Water Act requires states and authorized tribes to periodically review, and as appropriate, adopt new or revised WQS to meet the requirements of the statute. Section 303 of the Clean Water Act requires that each state develop WQS for jurisdictional waters of the United States within their borders. They establish the water quality goals for a specific waterbody and also serve as a regulatory basis for the development of water-quality based effluent limits and strategies for individual point source discharges.

WQS consists of three parts:

- The designated use of a waterbody;
- the water quality criteria that are necessary to protect existing uses and to attain the beneficial uses designated by the state; and
- an antidegradation statement or policy to protect existing uses in high quality water.

Section 303 specifies the adoption of WQS as primarily the responsibility of the states and tribes. The states must adopt uses consistent with Clean Water Act objectives and water quality criteria sufficient to protect the chosen uses. However, EPA is required to ensure that the state WQS meet the minimum requirements of the Clean Water Act. Therefore, the Clean Water Act regulations provide for EPA review of any state WQS changes.

The Arkansas WQS are found in Arkansas Pollution Control & Ecology Regulation No. 2.

The objectives of the EPA slide presentation include:

- Basics of a WQS variance
- Understand how using a WQS variance can help to get real improvements in water quality
- Decide if a WQS variance is the right tool

- Learn how to adopt a WQS variance and submit it to EPA
- Understand how WQS variances relate to other Clean Water Act Programs

A link to slide presentation and the infographics can be downloaded here.