

33 CFR Part 323

Permits for Discharges of Dredged or Fill Material Into Waters of the United States

AUTHORITY: 33 U.S.C. 1344.

Section 323.1 - General.

This regulation prescribes, in addition to the general policies of 33 CFR Part 320 and procedures of 33 CFR Part 325, those special policies, practices, and procedures to be followed by the Corps of Engineers in connection with the review of applications for DA permits to authorize the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States pursuant to section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1344) (hereinafter referred to as section 404). (See 33 CFR 320.2(g).) Certain discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States are also regulated under other authorities of the Department of the Army. These include dams and dikes in navigable waters of the United States pursuant to section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 401; see 33 CFR Part 321) and certain structures or work in or affecting navigable waters of the United States pursuant to section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403; see 33 CFR Part 322). A DA permit will also be required under these additional authorities if they are applicable to activities involving discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. Applicants for DA permits under this part should refer to the other cited authorities and implementing regulations for these additional permit requirements to determine whether they also are applicable to their proposed activities.

Section 323.2 Definitions.

For the purpose of this part, the following terms are defined:

(a) The term "**waters of the United States**" and all other terms relating to the geographic scope of jurisdiction are defined at 33 CFR Part 328.

(b) The term "**lake**" means a standing body of open water that occurs in a natural depression fed by one or more streams from which a stream may flow, that occurs due to the widening or natural blockage or cutoff of a river or stream, or that occurs in an isolated natural depression that is not a part of a surface river or stream. The term also includes a standing body of open water created by artificially blocking or restricting the flow of a river, stream, or tidal area. As used in this regulation, the term does not include artificial lakes or ponds created by excavating and/or diking dry land to collect and retain water for such purposes as stock watering, irrigation, settling basins, cooling, or rice growing.

(c) The term "**dredged material**" means material that is excavated or dredged from waters of the United States.

(d)

(1) Except as provided below in paragraph (d)(3), the term *discharge of dredged material* means any addition of dredged material into, including redeposit of dredged material other than incidental fallback within, the waters of the United States. The term includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- (i) the addition of dredged material to a specified discharge site located in waters of the United States;
- (ii) the runoff or overflow from a contained land or water disposal area; and
- (iii) any addition, including redeposit other than incidental fallback, of dredged material, including excavated material, into waters of the United States which is incidental to any activity, including mechanized land-clearing, ditching, channelization, or other excavation.

(2)

(i) The Corps and EPA regard the use of mechanized earth-moving equipment to conduct land-clearing, ditching, channelization, in-stream mining or other earth-moving activity in the United States as resulting in a discharge of dredged material unless project-specific evidence shows that the activity results in only incidental fallback. This paragraph (i) does not and is not intended to shift any burden in any administrative or judicial proceeding under the CWA.

(ii) *Incidental fallback* is the redeposit of small volumes of dredged material that is incidental to excavation activity in waters of the United States when such material falls back to substantially the same place as the initial removal. Examples of incidental fallback include soil that is disturbed when dirt is shoveled and the back-spill that comes off a bucket when such small volume of soil or dirt falls into substantially the same place from which it was initially removed.

(3) The term *discharge of dredged material* does not include the following:

(i) discharges of pollutants into waters of the United States resulting from the onshore subsequent processing of dredged material that is extracted for any commercial use (other than fill). These discharges are subject to section 402 of the Clean Water Act even though the extraction and deposit of such material may require a permit from the Corps or applicable state Section 404 program.

(ii) activities that involve only the cutting or removing of vegetation above the ground (e.g., mowing, rotary cutting, and chain-sawing) where the activity neither substantially disturbs the root system, nor involves mechanized pushing, dragging, or other similar activities that redeposit excavated soil material.

(iii) incidental fallback

(4) Section 404 authorization is not required for the following:

(i) any incidental addition, including redeposit, of dredged material associated with any activity that does not have or would not have the effect of destroying or degrading an area of waters of the United States as defined in paragraphs (d)(5) and (d)(6) of this section; however, this exception does not apply to any person preparing to undertake mechanized land-clearing, ditching, channelization and other excavation activity in a water of the United States, which would result in a redeposit of dredged material, unless the person demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Corps, or EPA as appropriate, prior to commencing the activity involving the discharge, that the activity would not have the effect of destroying or degrading any area of waters of the United States, as defined in paragraphs (d)(5) and (d)(6) of this section. The person proposing to undertake mechanized land-clearing, ditching, channelization or other excavation activity bears the burden of demonstrating that such activity would not destroy or degrade any area of waters of the United States.

(ii) incidental movement of dredged material occurring during normal dredging operations, as defined as dredging for navigation in *navigable waters of the United States*, as that term is defined in part 329 of this chapter, with proper authorization from the Congress and/or the Corps pursuant to part 322 of this Chapter; however, this exception is not applicable to dredging activities in wetlands, as that term is defined at section 328.3 of this Chapter.

(iii) certain discharges, such as those associated with normal farming, silviculture, and ranching activities, are not prohibited by otherwise subject to regulation under Section 404. See 33 CFR 323.4 for discharges that do not require permits.

(5) For purposes of this section, an activity associated with a discharge of dredged material destroys an area of waters of the United States if it alters the area in such a way that it would no longer be a water of the United States.

[**Note:** Unauthorized discharges into waters of the United States do not eliminate Clean Water Act jurisdiction, even where such unauthorized discharges have the effect of destroying waters of the United States.]

(6) For purposes of this section, an activity associated with a discharge of dredged material degrades an area of waters of the United States if it has more than a *de minimis* (i.e., inconsequential) effect on the area by causing an identifiable individual or cumulative adverse effect on any aquatic function.

(e) (1) Except as specified in paragraph (e)(3) of this section, the term fill material means material placed in waters of the United States where the material has the effect of:

(i) Replacing any portion of a water of the United States with dry land; or

(ii) Changing the bottom elevation of any portion of a water of the United States.

(2) Examples of such fill material include, but are not limited to: rock, sand, soil, clay, plastics, construction debris, wood chips, overburden from mining or other excavation activities, and materials used to create any structure or infrastructure in the waters of the United States.

(3) The term fill material does not include trash or garbage.

(f) The term "**discharge of fill material**" means the addition of fill material into waters of the United States. The term generally includes, without limitation, the following activities: Placement of fill that is necessary for the construction of any structure or infrastructure in a water of the United States; the building of any structure, infrastructure, or impoundment requiring rock, sand, dirt, or other material for its construction; site-development fills for recreational, industrial, commercial, residential, or other uses; causeways or road fills; dams and dikes; artificial islands; property protection and/or reclamation devices such as riprap, groins, seawalls, breakwaters, and revetments; beach nourishment; levees; fill for structures such as sewage treatment facilities, intake and outfall pipes associated with power plants and sub-aqueous utility lines; placement of fill material for construction or maintenance of any liner, berm, or other infrastructure associated with solid waste landfills; placement of overburden, slurry, or tailings or similar mining-related materials; and artificial reefs. The term does not include plowing, cultivating, seeding and harvesting for the production of food, fiber, and forest products (See Section 323.4 for the definition of these terms). See Section 323.3(c) concerning the regulation of the placement of pilings in waters of the United States.

(g) The term "**individual permit**" means a Department of the Army authorization that is issued following a case-by-case evaluation of a specific project involving the proposed discharge(s) in accordance with the procedures of this part and 33 CFR Part 325 and a determination that the proposed discharge is in the public interest pursuant to 33 CFR Part 320.

(h) The term "**general permit**" means a Department of the Army authorization that is issued on a nationwide or regional basis for a category or categories of activities when:

- (1) Those activities are substantially similar in nature and cause only minimal individual and cumulative environmental impacts; or
- (2) The general permit would result in avoiding unnecessary duplication of regulatory control exercised by another Federal, state, or local agency provided it has been determined that the environmental consequences of the action are individually and cumulatively minimal. (See 33 CFR 325.2(e) and 33 CFR Part 330.)

Section 323.3 - Discharge requiring permits.

(a) **General.** Except as provided in Section 323.4 of this Part, DA permits will be required for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. Certain discharges specified in 33 CFR Part 330 are permitted by that regulation ("nationwide permits"). Other discharges may be authorized by district or division engineers on a regional basis ("regional permits"). If a discharge of dredged or fill material is not exempted by Section 323.4 of this Part or permitted by 33 CFR Part 330, an individual or regional section 404 permit will be required for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States.

(b) **Activities of Federal agencies.** Discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States done by or on behalf of any Federal agency, other than the Corps of Engineers (see 33

CFR Part 209.145), are subject to the authorization procedures of these regulations. Agreement for construction or engineering services performed for other agencies by the Corps of Engineers does not constitute authorization under the regulations. Division and district engineers will therefore advise Federal agencies and instrumentalities accordingly and cooperate to the fullest extent in expediting the processing of their applications.

(c) *Pilings*

(1) Placement of pilings in waters of the United States constitutes a discharge of fill material and requires a Section 404 permit when such placement has or would have the effect of a discharge of fill material. Examples of such activities that have the effect of a discharge of fill material include, but are not limited to, the following: Projects where the pilings are so closely spaced that sedimentation rates would be increased; projects in which the pilings themselves effectively would replace the bottom of a water-body; projects involving the placement of pilings that would reduce the reach or impair the flow or circulation of waters of the United States; and projects involving the placement of pilings which would result in the adverse alteration or elimination of aquatic functions.

(2) Placement of pilings in waters of the United States that does not have or would not have the effect of a discharge of fill material shall not require a Section 404 permit. Placement of pilings for linear projects, such as bridges, elevated walkways, and power line structures, generally does not have the effect of a discharge of fill material. Furthermore, placement of pilings in waters of the United States for piers, wharves, and an individual house on stilts generally does not have the effect of a discharge of fill material. All pilings, however, placed in the *navigable waters of the United States*, as that term is defined in part 329 of this chapter, require authorization under section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (see part 322 of this chapter).

Section 323.4 - Discharges not requiring permits.

(a) *General.* Except as specified in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, any discharge of dredged or fill material that may result from any of the following activities is not prohibited by or otherwise subject to regulation under section 404:

(1)

(i) Normal farming, silviculture and ranching activities such as plowing, seeding, cultivating, minor drainage, and harvesting for the production of food, fiber, and forest products, or upland soil and water conservation practices, as defined in paragraph (a)(1)(iii) of this section.

(ii) To fall under this exemption, the activities specified in paragraph (a)(1)(i) of this section must be part of an established (i.e., on-going) farming, silviculture, or ranching operation and must be in accordance with definitions in Section 323.4(a)(1)(iii). Activities on areas lying fallow as part of a conventional rotational

cycle, are part of an established operation. Activities which bring an area into farming, silviculture, or ranching use are not part of an established operation. An operation ceases to be established when the area on which it was conducted has been converted to another use or has lain idle so long that modifications to the hydrological regime are necessary to resume operations. If an activity takes place outside the waters of the United States, or if it does not involve a discharge, it does not need a section 404 permit, whether or not it is part of an established farming, silviculture, or ranching operation.

(iii)

(A) Cultivating means physical methods of soil treatment employed within established farming, ranching and silviculture lands on farm, ranch, or forest crops to aid and improve their growth, quality or yield.

(B) Harvesting means physical measures employed directly upon farm, forest, or ranch crops within established agricultural and silvicultural lands to bring about their removal from farm, forest, or ranch land, but does not include the construction of farm, forest, or ranch roads.

(C)

(1) Minor Drainage means:

(i) The discharge of dredged or fill material incidental to connecting upland drainage facilities to waters of the United States, adequate to effect the removal of excess soil moisture from upland croplands. (Construction and maintenance of upland (dry land) facilities, such as ditching and tiling, incidental to the planting, cultivating, protecting, or harvesting of crops, involve no discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, and as such never require a section 404 permit.);

(ii) The discharge of dredged or fill material for the purpose of installing ditching or other such water control facilities incidental to planting, cultivating, protecting, or harvesting of rice, cranberries or other wetland crop species, where these activities and the discharge occur in waters of the United States which are in established use for such agricultural and silvicultural wetland crop production;

(iii) The discharge of dredged or fill material for the purpose of manipulating the water levels of, or regulating the flow or distribution of water within, existing impoundments which have been constructed in accordance with applicable requirements of CWA, and which are in established use for the production of rice, cranberries, or other wetland crop species. (The provisions of paragraphs (a)(1)(iii)(C)(1) (ii) and (iii) of this section apply to areas that are in established use exclusively for wetland crop production as well as areas in

established use for conventional wetland/non-wetland crop rotation (e.g., the rotations of rice and soybeans) where such rotation results in the cyclical or intermittent temporary dewatering of such areas.)

(iv) The discharges of dredged or fill material incidental to the emergency removal of sandbars, gravel bars, or other similar blockages which are formed during flood flows or other events, where such blockages close or constrict previously existing drainage-ways and, if not promptly removed, would result in damage to or loss of existing crops or would impair or prevent the plowing, seeding, harvesting or cultivating of crops on land in established use for crop production. Such removal does not include enlarging or extending the dimensions of, or changing the bottom elevations of, the affected drainage-way as it existed prior to the formation of the blockage. Removal must be accomplished within one year of discovery of such blockages in order to be eligible for exemption.

(2) Minor drainage in waters of the U.S. is limited to drainage within areas that are part of an established farming or silviculture operation. It does not include drainage associated with the immediate or gradual conversion of a wetland to a non-wetland (e.g., wetland species to upland species not typically adapted to life in saturated soil conditions), or conversion from one wetland use to another (for example, silviculture to farming). In addition, minor drainage does not include the construction of any canal, ditch, dike or other waterway or structure which drains or otherwise significantly modifies a stream, lake, swamp, bog or any other wetland or aquatic area constituting waters of the United States. Any discharge of dredged or fill material into the waters of the United States incidental to the construction of any such structure or waterway requires a permit.

(D) Plowing means all forms of primary tillage, including moldboard, chisel, or wide-blade plowing, discing, harrowing and similar physical means utilized on farm, forest or ranch land for the breaking up, cutting, turning over, or stirring of soil to prepare it for the planting of crops. The term does not include the redistribution of soil, rock, sand, or other surficial materials in a manner which changes any area of the waters of the United States to dry land. For example, the redistribution of surface materials by blading, grading, or other means to fill in wetland areas is not plowing. Rock crushing activities which result in the loss of natural drainage characteristics, the reduction of water storage and recharge capabilities, or the overburden of natural water filtration capacities do not constitute plowing. Plowing as described above will never involve a discharge of dredged or fill material.

(E) Seeding means the sowing of seed and placement of seedlings to produce farm, ranch, or forest crops and includes the placement of soil beds for seeds or seedlings on established farm and forest lands.

(2) Maintenance, including emergency reconstruction of recently damaged parts, of currently serviceable structures such as dikes, dams, levees, groins, riprap, breakwaters, causeways, bridge abutments or approaches, and transportation structures. Maintenance does not include any modification that changes the character, scope, or size of the original fill design. Emergency reconstruction must occur within a reasonable period of time after damage occurs in order to qualify for this exemption.

(3) Construction or maintenance of farm or stock ponds or irrigation ditches, or the maintenance (but not construction) of drainage ditches. Discharges associated with siphons, pumps, headgates, wingwalls, weirs, diversion structures, and such other facilities as are appurtenant and functionally related to irrigation ditches are included in this exemption. **(4)** Construction of temporary sedimentation basins on a construction site which does not include placement of fill material into waters of the U.S. The term "construction site" refers to any site involving the erection of buildings, roads, and other discrete structures and the installation of support facilities necessary for construction and utilization of such structures. The term also includes any other land areas which involve land-disturbing excavation activities, including quarrying or other mining activities, where an increase in the runoff of sediment is controlled through the use of temporary sedimentation basins. **(5)** Any activity with respect to which a state has an approved program under section 208(b)(4) of the CWA which meets the requirements of sections 208(b)(4)(B) and (C). **(6)** Construction or maintenance of farm roads, forest roads, or temporary roads for moving mining equipment, where such roads are constructed and maintained in accordance with best management practices (BMPs) to assure that flow and circulation patterns and chemical and biological characteristics of waters of the United States are not impaired, that the reach of the waters of the United States is not reduced, and that any adverse effect on the aquatic environment will be otherwise minimized. These BMPs which must be applied to satisfy this provision shall include those detailed BMPs described in the state's approved program description pursuant to the requirements of 40 CFR Part 233.22(i), and shall also include the following baseline provisions:

(i) Permanent roads (for farming or forestry activities), temporary access roads (for mining, forestry, or farm purposes) and skid trails (for logging) in waters of the U.S. shall be held to the minimum feasible number, width, and total length consistent with the purpose of specific farming, silvicultural or mining operations, and local topographic and climatic conditions;

(ii) All roads, temporary or permanent, shall be located sufficiently far from streams or other water bodies (except for portions of such roads which must cross water bodies) to minimize discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S.;

(iii) The road fill shall be bridged, culverted, or otherwise designed to prevent the restriction of expected flood flows;

(iv) The fill shall be properly stabilized and maintained during and following construction to prevent erosion;

- (v) Discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States to construct a road fill shall be made in a manner that minimizes the encroachment of trucks, tractors, bulldozers, or other heavy equipment within waters of the United States (including adjacent wetlands) that lie outside the lateral boundaries of the fill itself;
- (vi) In designing, constructing, and maintaining roads, vegetative disturbance in the waters of the U.S. shall be kept to a minimum;
- (vii) The design, construction and maintenance of the road crossing shall not disrupt the migration or other movement of those species of aquatic life inhabiting the water body;
- (viii) Borrow material shall be taken from upland sources whenever feasible;
- (ix) The discharge shall not take, or jeopardize the continued existence of, a threatened or endangered species as defined under the Endangered Species Act, or adversely modify or destroy the critical habitat of such species;
- (x) Discharges into breeding and nesting areas for migratory waterfowl, spawning areas, and wetlands shall be avoided if practical alternatives exist;
- (xi) The discharge shall not be located in the proximity of a public water supply intake;
- (xii) The discharge shall not occur in areas of concentrated shellfish production;
- (xiii) The discharge shall not occur in a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System;
- (xiv) The discharge of material shall consist of suitable material free from toxic pollutants in toxic amounts; and
- (xv) All temporary fills shall be removed in their entirety and the area restored to its original elevation.

(b) If any discharge of dredged or fill material resulting from the activities listed in paragraphs (a)(1)-(6) of this section contains any toxic pollutant listed under section 307 of the CWA such discharge shall be subject to any applicable toxic effluent standard or prohibition, and shall require a Section 404 permit.

(c) Any discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States incidental to any of the activities identified in paragraphs (a) (1)-(6) of this section must have a permit if it is part of an activity whose purpose is to convert an area of the waters of the United States into a use to which it was not previously subject, where the flow or circulation of waters of the United States may be impaired or the reach of such waters reduced. Where the proposed discharge will result in significant discernible alterations to flow or circulation, the presumption is that flow or circulation may be impaired by such alteration. For example, a permit will be required for the conversion of a cypress swamp to some other use or the conversion of a wetland from silvicultural to agricultural use when there is a discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States in conjunction with construction of dikes, drainage ditches or other works or structures used to effect such conversion. A conversion of a Section 404 wetland to a non-wetland is a change in use of an area of waters of the United States. A discharge which elevates the bottom of waters of the United States without converting it to dry land does not thereby reduce the reach of, but may alter the flow or circulation of, waters of the United States.

(d) Federal projects which qualify under the criteria contained in section 404(r) of the CWA are exempt from section 404 permit requirements, but may be subject to other state or Federal requirements.

Section 323.5 - Program transfer to states.

Section 404(h) of the CWA allows the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to transfer administration of the section 404 permit program for discharges into certain waters of the United States to qualified states. (The program cannot be transferred for those waters which are presently used, or are susceptible to use in their natural condition or by reasonable improvement as a means to transport interstate or foreign commerce shoreward to their ordinary high water mark, including all waters which are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide shoreward to the high tide line, including wetlands adjacent thereto). See 40 CFR Parts 233 and 124 for procedural regulations for transferring Section 404 programs to states. Once a state's 404 program is approved and in effect, the Corps of Engineers will suspend processing of section 404 applications in the applicable waters and will transfer pending applications to the state agency responsible for administering the program. District engineers will assist EPA and the states in any way practicable to effect transfer and will develop appropriate procedures to ensure orderly and expeditious transfer.

Section 323.6 - Special policies and procedures.

(a) The Secretary of the Army has delegated to the Chief of Engineers the authority to issue or deny section 404 permits. The district engineer will review applications for permits for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the Administrator, EPA, under authority of section 404(b)(1) of the CWA. (see 40 CFR Part 230.) Subject to consideration of any economic impact on navigation and anchorage pursuant to section 404(b)(2), a permit will be denied if the discharge that would be authorized by such a permit would not comply with the 404(b)(1) guidelines. If the district engineer determines that the proposed discharge would comply with the 404(b)(1) guidelines, he will grant the permit unless issuance would be contrary to the public interest.

(b) The Corps will not issue a permit where the regional administrator of EPA has notified the district engineer and applicant in writing pursuant to 40 CFR 231.3(a)(1) that he intends to issue a public notice of a proposed determination to prohibit or withdraw the specification, or to deny, restrict or withdraw the use for specification, of any defined area as a disposal site in accordance with section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act. However the Corps will continue to complete the administrative processing of the application while the section 404(c) procedures are underway including completion of final coordination with EPA under 33 CFR Part 325.