



Press Release

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Environmentalists Praise Issuance of Long Overdue Air Permits, Next Steps Include Budget User Fee Increase to Address EPA Concerns

Madison, WI --- The Sierra Club and Midwest Environmental Advocates praised state government for issuing long overdue Air Permits for the major air polluters in the state. The next steps include pollution fee increases in the new State Budget to avoid US EPA penalties.

“We are pleased that all of Wisconsin’s major air pollution sources are finally subject to permits,” said Caryl Terrell, Chapter Director of the Wisconsin Sierra Club. “This ensures that we will have cleaner air faster.”

“DNR’s actions are long overdue, and would not have happened without the Sierra Club, Midwest Environmental Advocates, and other environmental organizations petitioning the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and convincing them to issue a Notice of Deficiency to Wisconsin,” said Melissa Scanlan, Executive Director and Founder of Midwest Environmental Advocates.

“Now that the backlog is taken care of, it is now time to put the rest of the Air Management Program on a stable financial footing, as required by the federal Clean Air Act,” said Terrell. “The 2005-2007 State Budget needs to include an increase in pollution fees to adequately fund the program and remove all further deficiencies in the program as required by the EPA’s Notice of Deficiency.”

“If the adopted Budget does not include pollution fee increases by September 2004,” Terrell continued, “the EPA is required by law to begin sanctions on the State of Wisconsin that include loss of federal transportation dollars and moving permit issuance to EPA’s Chicago Regional Office. No one wants these sanctions, so increasing the pollution fees is a top priority.”

“How quickly permits are issued is not the ultimate measure of government services with regard to air pollution. The ultimate measure is whether we have clean, safe air to breathe,” said Terrell. “There is an active air quality advisory this week because of fine particle pollution, or soot. Obviously, we need to do a better job protecting our families and communities from air pollution. Eliminating the permit backlog is just one step on the road to clean, safe air.”

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FAST FACTS ABOUT WISCONSIN'S AIR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

According to Wisconsin's Air Audit, the DNR has not in the past and will not this year meet the EPA's goal of inspecting all major air pollution sources every two years and all minor sources every five years.

All Wisconsin residents are forced to breathe polluted air at some point during the year. Almost 500,000 Wisconsinites have asthma and other breathing problems, according to the American Lung Association.¹ It is the number one reason kids miss school.

Over the past three budget cycles Air Program staff has decreased by 40 full-time staff from 202 to 162.75, according to the DNR.

- As a result, a backlog grew of unfinished permits for Wisconsin's 578 major sources of air pollution.
- Between FY 1994 and FY 2002, there was a 41.3% decline in the number of facilities the DNR inspects annually. As a result 11% of Wisconsin's major polluters (i.e. 63 polluters) were never inspected in the program's 30 year history, according to the WI Legislative Audit Bureau report. 173 facilities had NEVER been inspected. 10% of major facilities and almost 20% of synthetic minors had NEVER been inspected as of June 30, 2003. This percentage varied by region, with almost 36% of synthetic minors never inspected in the Northern Region.
- Federal law requires each polluter be inspected at least once every two years.
- Over one third of the few polluters that were inspected (over sixty) were either "significant violators" or had had one or more violations within the past two years.²

¹American Lung Association, State of the Air Report, 2004,
http://lungaction.org/reports/SOTA04_statesensitive.html?geo_area_id=55.

² www.epa.gov/echo