
State Water Resources Control Board

Water Quality Certification Fees for Discharges of Dredge and Fill Material Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Water Quality Certification (WQC) for Discharges of Dredge and Fill Material program issues permits for activities that place fill material into, or remove material from, California's surface waters. The Water Board charges fees to permit applicants to pay for the staff time needed to review, issue, and track permits. This FAQ document answers common questions about how fees are set, billed, and paid.

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Fee Determination

1. How do I know if I need a Water Quality Certification for Discharges of Dredge or Fill Materials Permit?

If your project may result in a discharge of dredged or fill material to waters of the state, then you need to submit an application with the State or Regional Water Board. Discharges of dredged or fill material often occur when work is conducted in waters. Examples include, but are not limited to, development projects that fill in a water, dredging to maintain channel capacity, and activities that change the volume, grade, or capacity of an aquatic resource. The type of dredge or fill permit you need depends on whether the project impacts federal or exclusively state waters:

- **State-only permit (Waste Discharge Requirements or WDRs):** Issued when the project affects waters not covered by the federal Clean Water Act. These waters are protected under California's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act.
- **State/Federal permit (Water Quality Certification):** Issued when the project affects waters covered by the federal Clean Water Act, also called "waters of the U.S." This permit, under section 401 of the Clean Water Act, is required before an applicant can receive a section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or other federal permit.

Reach out to the appropriate Regional Board (see contact list linked below) to determine what type of permit is required for your project or to schedule a pre-filing meeting.

2. How is the fee determined?

Fees are assessed based on criteria specific to each type of discharge, according to the current fiscal year's (July 1—June 30) [fee schedule](#). The fee schedule is available at:

(<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/fees/stakeholder/docs/2025/wqcfeeschedule.pdf>)

Common fee categories in the current fee schedule include:

- **Fill & Excavation Discharges (Category A):** Flat application fee, project fee calculated using impact area (sum of temporary and permanent impacts), and an annual fee.
- **Dredging Discharges (Category B):** Flat application fee and annual fee based on volume of material dredged the previous year.
- **Sand Mining, Ecological Restoration, Emergency, Low Impact Discharges (Categories C, D, E, and F):** Flat application and an annual fee.

This [Fee Calculator](#) may be used to estimate fees:

(https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/fees/water_quality/docs/dredgefillcalculator.xls)

3. Which fee schedule applies to my project?

The fee schedule is updated annually. Application and project fees (paid before permit issuance) are based on the fee schedule in effect when your application is submitted. If issuance lasts more than one year after initial application, contact Water Board staff to confirm which schedule applies.

Annual fees are based on the fee schedule in effect at the time of annual billing. Fee schedules are normally updated in November or December.

4. What is the difference between an application fee and a project fee?

An application fee must be submitted with your application. All projects require this fee for the application to be determined complete. For Category A projects, any remaining project fee, based on the total impacts to waters, is generally due before a permit can be issued.

5. My project involves both fill/excavation and dredging. Which fee category applies?

If a project includes **both Category A and Category B discharges**:

- The application and project fees are assessed under Category A.
- The annual fee will be based on the higher of the two applicable categories (See footnote 10 in the Fee Schedule, link to Fee Schedule in question 2).

6. How do I know if I qualify for a Project Activity-Specific Fee Category?

Project Activity-Specific fees are determined by Water Board staff during the application review.

Below are specific project activities that qualify for special fee consideration:

- **Sand Mining, In-Stream Gravel Mining and Beach Nourishment Discharges (Category C):** This fee category applies to aggregate extraction using pollutant-free material in surface waters or beach nourishment projects.
- **Ecological Restoration and Enhancement Projects (EREP) (Category D):** A project qualifies for the EREP fee category if it is **voluntarily undertaken** to restore or enhance a degraded aquatic ecosystem and is not driven by mitigation or land development requirements. Projects must meet the definition in the fee schedule (see link to fee schedule in question 2), which includes that the project must be conducted under a binding agreement with a qualified federal, state, local, or conservation organization, or be led by a resource management agency, and does not include converting natural wetlands or streams to uplands or channelized systems. Routine maintenance or hydrologic rehabilitation **to improve ecological function** for a voluntary project is allowed under this category.

This fee category does not include establishment of mitigation banks.

A voluntary project is considered an action undertaken separate from any regulatory requirements (e.g., the project is not compensatory mitigation to offset authorized impacts).

- **Low Impact Discharges (Category E):** A project may be classified as a low impact discharge if it meets all of the following:
 - **Small Discharge Size**
 - Fill: less than **0.1 acre** and **300 linear feet**
 - Dredging: less than **25 cubic yards**
 - **Minimal Environmental Impact**
 - All practicable measures taken to avoid impacts
 - Temporary impacts are restored as quickly as practicable
 - No net loss of wetland, riparian, or headwater functions
 - **No Harmful Effects**
 - Does **not** destabilize waterbeds
 - Avoids cumulative impacts, pollution, or toxicity
 - Does **not** harm water quality, beneficial uses, or sensitive species

- **Emergency Projects Authorized by a Water Board General Order (Category F):** Enrollees under a general orders that authorizes emergency projects. For list of eligible orders, see the [Emergency Permitting for Discharges of Dredged or Fill Material](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/emergency-permitting.html) (https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/emergency-permitting.html) webpage.

7. Do I pay a fee for requesting an amendment?

It depends on the type of amendment. Current fee regulations have additional information on Amended Order Fees (Category G):

- **Category D Ecology Restoration and Enhancement Projects or administrative amendments (changes that require no additional technical analysis or additional compensatory mitigation):**

No fee.

- **Changes to impact character, location, or volume of discharge; or time extension that results in temporal loss of resource function (less than 50% increase in impact, and no change to mitigated aquatic resource type):**

Additional fee based on increased discharge.

- **Change requires supplemental CEQA analysis, or change in impact character, location, or volume of discharge, or time extension that results in a temporal loss of resource function (greater than 50% increase in impact, change in mitigated aquatic resource type):**

A new project fee applies.

Annual Invoicing

8. Why did I get an invoice?

Annual invoices are issued for all projects that are active during any part of the fiscal year and are typically sent out in fall/winter. If you have an active permit for any part of fiscal year, you are subject to annual invoice even if the project is closed prior to invoice issuance. A project is closed after all permit conditions, including monitoring, are satisfied and the Water Board issues a Notice of Project Complete Letter.

9. How long will I be billed?

From the permit's effective date until the end of the billing cycle following project closeout. Invoices are mailed to the billing address on file. You can confirm your annual invoice will be sent to the correct address by contacting the [Fee Branch Staff](#) (contact information provided in Question 21). Please include your Waste Discharge Identification (WDID) number or an invoice number in your email.

10. Do I still pay if I'm not actively discharging?

Yes. Fees apply as long as you have authorization to discharge until all permit conditions are met (including restoration and mitigation requirements), even if you are not actively discharging.

11. How do I stop annual fees?

If you are no longer discharging, and all permit conditions have been met, request a Notice of Project Complete letter from the Water Board. Once the Water Board approves project closeout, your WQC permit will be terminated. If your project is closed out prior to issuance of that fiscal year's annual invoicing, you should expect one final invoice. Dredging permits will receive their final invoice in the following fiscal year after the permit is closed out since dredging invoices are based on the prior year's dredged amount.

12. Why is my annual fee different from last year?

The State Water Board adopts a fee schedule each year. Annual adjustments may be necessary to ensure revenue collected aligns with funding levels and staffing resources. (Wat. Code, § 13260, subd. (d)(1)(B).)

13. Why is the annual fee amount different from the fee schedule amount?

Invoicing for projects begins in the fiscal year (July 1—June 30) after the certification is issued and continues annually thereafter. The original application fee covers the first twelve (12) consecutive months of the project's certification, which means that the first year's annual fee invoice could be prorated. Subsequent annual fee amounts will not be prorated. Proration does not apply to dredging discharges as annual active discharge amounts are determined based on actual volume dredged and are invoiced based on the prior fiscal year's dredged amount.

14. If I stop discharging mid-year, will my fee be prorated?

No. The full annual fee applies to projects active for any portion of the fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). To prevent unnecessary invoices, request a Notice of Project Complete as soon as possible after permit requirements have been met.

15. My project is complete. Why did I get an invoice?

Invoices continue until the Water Board issues a Notice of Project Complete Letter. Projects active for any portion of the fiscal year must pay an annual fee. Submit a request and required documents to the appropriate Regional Board (see contact list linked below) to close your project.

16. My permit expired. Why did I get an invoice?

All permit conditions remain applicable, including the requirement to pay an annual fee, until a Notice of Project Complete Letter is issued regardless of permit expiration. Submit a request and required documents to the appropriate Regional Board (see contact list linked below) to close your project.

17. I sold my facility. Who is responsible for the invoice?

You remain responsible until the permit is officially transferred. Both you and the new owner must notify the Water Board in writing in accordance with the requirements set forth in your permit. Until the transfer is complete, invoices are sent to the original discharger.

Payments

18. Are different payment forms (credit card, transfer, check) accepted?

Yes. See the [WQC Payment Guidance Document](#) for details on how to make a payment. Options include:

- Credit card (Visa, MasterCard, Discover): Official Payments Corporation System: <https://www.officialpayments.com/>
- To make an Automated Clearing House (ACH) Debit payment visit the online EFT payment system: www.govone.com/PAYCAL/SWRCB/Account.

To prevent delays, always include your application number and payment documentation with your application.

19. What happens if I do not pay my invoice?

- Invoices are delinquent after 30 days.
- Up to three late notices are sent if invoice is not paid.
- Balances that remain outstanding 90 days past the date of the original invoice may be sent to an external collection agency.

20. How do I confirm my payment was received?

- Application/project fees: Email 401accountingreceipts@waterboards.ca.gov with project details.
- Annual invoices: Allow two weeks for processing. Check status at the [Invoice Search Site](https://public3.waterboards.ca.gov/infofees/faces/invoiceSearch.xhtml) (<https://public3.waterboards.ca.gov/infofees/faces/invoiceSearch.xhtml>)

21. Who can I contact for more information?

For questions about the fee setting process or annual invoices, contact Fee Branch staff:

- Email: FeeBranch@waterboards.ca.gov
- Phone: (916) 341-5247 FAX: (916) 341-5248
- Website: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/fees/>

For questions about your permit contact the staff person assigned to your project. If you do not have an assigned contact, reach out to the appropriate Regional Board:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/docs/wqc_staffdir.pdf

22. What is the State Water Board's Taxpayer ID number?

Tax ID: 68-0281986. The Fee Branch website has a signed W-9

<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/fees/>.