



Permitting Tips and Timesavers

Knowing where to begin in the environmental permitting process is sometimes difficult. The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) has several tools available to help customers work through the permitting system and get started on the right track. By following these tips and timesavers we can help you avoid common time-consuming mistakes, costly loss of construction time and general frustration.

Tip

Select the project site carefully.

- ✓ If possible, choose sites with public water and sewer availability.
- ✓ If public water is not accessible, make sure to confirm that water is available onsite and is sufficient to provide for full project build-out.
- ✓ Check with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to verify if there are any jurisdictional water features onsite (e.g., streams or wetlands).
- ✓ If the project site is located within one of the 20 coastal counties (as designated by the Coastal Area Management Act - CAMA), check with the Division of Coastal Management to see if your project is subject to the rules and polices of CAMA.
- ✓ Check with the local governing body to verify that the proposed project complies with their land-use plan, subdivision and zoning ordinances, etc.
- ✓ Always do your due diligence. Some sites have cultural, historical, archeological or environmentally sensitive habitats or species. Therefore, they may have local, state or federal legal protections. If you are unsure, hire a consultant to help you understand and research your site. If a project site hasn't been developed, then there may be a good reason why. Review our "[Considerations for Development](#)" document to learn more about important items one should consider before beginning a project.

Tip

Avoid impacts to sensitive areas and know your site.

- ✓ Avoiding or minimizing impacts to natural watercourses and/or wetlands may reduce the number of permits you need as well as save you time and money. Regulations today require compensation for stream and wetland impacts through a process called mitigation.



Tip Avoid impacts to sensitive areas and know your site. *(Continued)*

- ✓ If your project cannot avoid impacting a stream or wetland area, then plan ahead for mitigation. An experienced environmental consultant can help you determine which areas require mitigation, how the process works and the cost per square foot.
- ✓ Inform the regulatory agency of any areas of concern on your project (e.g., really wet areas) or areas that you view as an amenity such as a pond. These could be subject to special regulatory requirements.
- ✓ When in doubt, ask. For example if you're unsure if an unnamed tributary on your property would be subject to regulations or if a wet area would be considered a protected wetland, call the NCDEQ Environmental Permit Assistance staff. Staff can look up a stream classification or they will connect you to the proper state and federal officials to verify early-on if rules and regulations will apply to your project.

Tip Schedule a Permit Assistance Scoping Meeting.

- ✓ Arrange a scoping meeting for complex projects or projects that may require multiple permits. These meetings allow you to sit down with multi-agency staff to discuss your proposed plans, foreseeable obstacles and receive constructive feedback before submitting your application(s). At a minimum, the Environmental Permit Assistance Coordinator will develop a tailored permit list for your project site to get you started on the right track. [Contact](#) the local Environmental Permit Assistance Coordinator in your area.

Tip Plan ahead and apply for permits early.

- ✓ Most of the time, applications and the additional materials needed (e.g., engineered design plans) require the assistance of an environmental consultant or a professional engineer. The cost of having an experienced consultant to prepare needed documents can save you time, money and frustration. So, ask around early from friends, developers or business owners who they use for assistance. Recommendations by word-of-mouth from trusted individuals are usually a good way to start.
- ✓ Waiting till the last minute to apply for your permits will undoubtedly cause frustration. Everyone wants their permits issued as quickly as possible and NCDEQ permitting staff try to accommodate. However, a regional office will typically cover from 10-20 counties. Therefore, permits must be reviewed in the order received. So, submit your plans early to avoid any possible delays. Express permitting options are available in some areas - check with your [local permit coordinator](#) for applicability.



Tip

Plan ahead and apply for permits early. (*Continued*)

- ✓ Visit our [NCDEQ online permit handbook](#). This handbook lists all of NCDEQ's permits and provides answers to frequently asked questions about each permit type. You may look up permit costs, timeframes for approval as well as how long the permit is valid.
- ✓ Try to apply for all of your permits at the same time to help avoid delays. If this is not possible, then let the environmental permitting assistance staff advise you on which permit types have the longest review period and should be applied for first.

Tip

File *complete* permit applications.

- ✓ Some programs have application checklists which help ensure that you address all of the needed information and submit the requested materials. Check with your Environmental Permit Assistance staff and have them obtain this information for you or look at the divisions' websites for application checklists.
- ✓ Fill-in all of the necessary information asked for on application forms. Always provide any additional materials such as design drawings, information about industrial processes, construction details, etc. required as part of the application submittal process.
- ✓ Make sure you *sign* all needed forms, have items like a professional engineer certification, notarized documents as well as property deeds all contained in your submittal if required. Applications missing these items will not be processed until needed information is received.
- ✓ Respond promptly to additional information requests. The faster you respond, the faster the permit reviewer can continue to process your permit.
- ✓ Try to avoid making significant changes to the application once it is submitted as this will undoubtedly cause a delay in the review process. If this is unavoidable and you are instructed by the permit reviewer or your environmental consultant, then a major change may necessitate a re-review.

Tip

Know your permit.

- ✓ One of the largest pitfalls is when a person spends their time, energy and financial resources to get all of the necessary permits with properly designed plans and then never reads or makes sure they understand the permitting requirements. The implementation of the permit is the obligation of the financially responsible party. If you do not understand or have any questions about the terms and conditions of your permits, then contact the appropriate NCDEQ staff representative for clarification.