

Description and Purpose

Dewatering operations are practices that manage the discharge of pollutants when non-stormwater, non-potable water, and accumulated precipitation (stormwater) is removed from a work location to proceed with construction work or to provide vector control.

The 2022 General Permit defines dewatering as the process of removing excess water in an excavation or impoundment by pumping or other mechanical means. Dewatering discharges authorized by the 2022 General Permit include mechanical pumping or syphoning of non-potable water from sources including, but not limited to: excavations, trenches, foundations, vaults, groundwater removal specifically related to the construction activities, and/or water collected in impoundments (e.g., ponds, puddles, low points on the active site, or other similar accumulation points).

This factsheet specifically incorporates the 2022 General Permit, Attachment J requirements. Dewatering activities subject to a separate National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit (e.g., de minimis and low threat discharges) are not subject to the dewatering requirements of Attachment J; obtain separate coverage as required by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) or the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). Potentially applicable NPDES Permits for Dewatering Discharges are listed in the SWRCB’s Dewatering Discharge Notification Guidance (SWRCB, 2024). Ensure that dewatering activities not subject to a separate NPDES permit comply with the dewatering requirements in Attachment J (Section IV.M. of the 2022 General Permit).

Categories

EC	Erosion Control	
SE	Sediment Control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
TC	Tracking Control	
WE	Wind Erosion Control	
NS	Non-Stormwater Management Control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
WM	Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control	

Legend:

- Primary Category
- Secondary Category

Targeted Constituents

Sediment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients	
Trash	
Metals	
Bacteria	
Oil and Grease	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Organics	

Potential Alternatives

- SE-5: Fiber Roll
- SE-13: Compost Sock/Berm
- SE-6: Gravel Bag Berm
- NS-5: Clear Water Diversion

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The General Permit incorporates Numeric Action Levels (NALs) for pH and turbidity for dewatering discharges. Discharges from dewatering operations can contain high levels of fine sediment that, if not properly treated, could lead to exceedances of the General Permit requirements or Basin Plan standards.

The dewatering operations described in this fact sheet are not Active Treatment Systems (ATS) SE-11) and do not include the use of chemical coagulants, chemical flocculants or electrocoagulants. ATS that are not subject to a separate NPDES permit must comply with the ATS requirements in Attachment F of the 2022 General Permit.

Discharges from Sediment Basins (SE-2) and Sediment Traps (SE-3) may be subject to the dewatering requirements of Attachment J of the 2022 General Permit. Sediment basin and sediment trap configuration and valve design, required drawdown time for vector control, operational drawdown in case of more frequent storms or storms larger than the design storm, or other unforeseen site conditions may result in the need to dewater a sediment basin and/or sediment trap, thus triggering Attachment J. Sediment basins and sediment traps that discharge under gravity flow with no mechanical pumping or syphoning, for example containing a skimmer or standpipe outlet structure, are not considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Suitable Applications

Dewatering practices are implemented for discharges of non-stormwater, non-potable water, and accumulated stormwater by mechanical pumping or syphoning from construction sites.

Non-stormwaters include, but are not limited to, groundwater, water from cofferdams, water diversions, and waters used during construction activities that must be removed from a work area to facilitate construction.

Practices identified in this section are also appropriate for implementation when managing the removal of accumulated precipitation (stormwater) from depressed areas at a construction site.

Stormwater mixed with non-stormwater or non-potable water should be managed as non-stormwater.

A clear water diversion is typically implemented where appropriate permits (401 Certification, 1602 Agreement, etc.) have been secured and work must be performed in a flowing stream or water body. If dewatering associated with a clear water diversion is required for your project, refer to Clear Water Diversion (NS-5).

Limitations

- Dewatering operations need to comply with applicable local and project-specific permits and regulations. In some areas, all dewatering activities require a dewatering permit.
- The discharge must be absent of pollutants in quantities that threaten to cause pollution or a nuisance.¹
- The dewatering activity may only take place in an area without known soil and/or groundwater contamination (including, but not limited to information from: GeoTracker,²

¹ 40 Code of Federal Regulations section 131.12, and SWRCB Resolution No. 68-16.

² <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>

local permitting authorities, RWQCBs, etc.) where that contamination could cause an exceedance of receiving water limitations.

- The dewatering activity must be in compliance with the receiving water limitations listed in General Permit, Section IV.D, including applicable TMDLs listed in Attachment H.
- Utilize outlet structures that withdraw water from the surface when conducting dewatering activity from sediment basins or similar impoundments, unless infeasible.
- Site conditions will dictate the design and use of dewatering operations.
- The controls discussed in this fact sheet primarily address sediment. Other secondary pollutant removal benefits are discussed where applicable.

Implementation

- Avoid dewatering discharges where possible by using the water, with appropriate approvals or permits, for onsite dust control, pumping to an onsite area for infiltration, disposing off, or site discharging to the sanitary sewer.
- Include dewatering monitoring in the Construction Site Monitoring Plan (CSMP) in the project Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).
- At least 24 hours prior to beginning a dewatering discharge notify the applicable RWQCB stormwater staff via email of the anticipated dewatering discharge. The general stormwater staff email addresses for each RWQCB may be found in Attachment C of the 2022 CGP or at the SWRCB website (https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/contact.html).
- A separate notification is required if there are changes to the dewatering activities (SWRCB, 2024).
- Analyze the dewatering effluent for pH and turbidity at the discharge location within the first hour of discharge and daily for continuous dewatering discharges. Each sample must instantaneously comply with the NALs for pH (within 6.5-8.5 standard pH units) and turbidity (250 nephelometric turbidity units).
- Cease discharge when the NALs are exceeded in a single sample, as follows:
 - Through an automated sampling device capable of ceasing the discharge if a single sample concentration/level exceeds the NALs;
 - By a Qualified SWPPP Practitioner (QSP) or trained QSP-delegate who is present during the dewatering activity and can halt dewatering if a NAL is exceeded for a single sample;

- If discharge cannot be ceased due to the need to protect human life or health or to prevent severe property damage, notify the RWQCB and local stormwater agency within 24 hours; or
- If discharge that exceeds pH and turbidity NALs cannot be stopped, notify the RWQCB and local stormwater agency within 24 hours.
- Following the NAL exceedance the Qualified SWPPP Developer (QSD) will revise the SWPPP to incorporate corrective actions to prevent further exceedances, within 10 days of the exceedance.
- The SWRCB and RWQCB, upon written notice, may:
 - Require additional constituents to be monitored;
 - Require additional or more frequent monitoring;
 - Require additional or different sampling locations;
 - Require treatment of the discharge with ATS (in accordance with Attachment F of the General Permit; and/or
 - Revoke authorization of dewatering discharges under the General Permit and require separate NPDES permit coverage for dewatering discharges to Waters of the U.S.
- The destination of discharge from dewatering activities will typically determine the type of permit required for the discharge. For example, when discharging to a water of the U.S., a dewatering permit may be required through the site's governing RWQCB. When discharging to a sanitary sewer a permit may need to be obtained from the owner of the sanitary sewer. When discharging to a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) a permit from the MS4 may be needed in addition to obtaining an RWQCB dewatering permit. Additional permits or permissions from other agencies may be required for dewatering cofferdams or diversions.
- Dewatering discharges may not cause erosion at the discharge point. Potential BMPs to limit erosion include:
 - Directly piping discharge to a storm drain inlet or hardened channel,
 - Geotextiles and Mats (EC-7),
 - Velocity Dissipation Devices (EC-10), Slope Drains (EC-11), and
 - Check Dams (SE-4).
- Appropriate BMPs must be implemented to maintain compliance with all applicable permits.
- Per the requirements of Attachment J, the QSD must update the site-specific SWPPP onsite at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of a dewatering discharge and upload the amended

SWPPP to SMARTS within 14 days with current information required. The revised SWPPP must be uploaded as part of a Change of Information through SMARTS.

- Maintain dewatering records in accordance with all local and project-specific permits and regulations.

Inspection and Maintenance

- Inspect and verify that dewatering BMPs are in place and functioning prior to the commencement of activities requiring dewatering.
- Inspect dewatering BMPs daily while dewatering activities are being conducted.
- Inspect all equipment before use. Monitor dewatering operations to ensure they do not cause offsite discharge or erosion.
- Sample and monitor dewatering discharges as required by the General Permit.
- Unit-specific maintenance requirements are included with the description of each unit.
- Sediment removed during the maintenance of a dewatering device may be either spread onsite and stabilized or disposed of at a disposal site as approved by the owner and documented in the SWPPP.
- Sediment that is commingled with other pollutants will be disposed of in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations and as approved by the owner.

Sediment Removal

A variety of methods can be used to treat water during dewatering operations. Several devices are presented below and provide options to achieve sediment removal. The sediment particle size and permit or receiving water limitations on sediment or turbidity are key considerations for selecting sediment treatment option(s); in some cases, the use of multiple devices may be appropriate. Use of other enhanced treatment methods (i.e., introduction of chemicals or electric current to enhance flocculation and removal of sediment) must comply with: 1) for storm drain or surface water discharges, the requirements for ATS (see SE-11 and Attachment F of the General Permit); 2) for storm drain or surface water discharges, the requirements for Passive Treatment (see SE-15 and Attachment G of the General Permit); or 3) for sanitary sewer discharges, the requirements of applicable sanitary sewer discharge permits.

Sediment Basin (see also SE-2)

Description:

- A sediment basin is a temporary basin with a controlled release structure that is formed by excavation or construction of an embankment to detain sediment-laden runoff and allow sediment to settle out before discharging. Sediment basins are larger than Sediment Traps (SE-3) and have a designed outlet structure.

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of trash, gravel, sand, silt, some metals that settle out with the sediment.

Implementation:

- Excavation and construction of related facilities is required.
- Temporary sediment basins should be fenced if safety is a concern.
- Outlet protection is required to prevent erosion at the outfall location.
- Discharges from sediment basins containing a skimmer or standpipe outlet structure that occur as a result of gravity flow with no mechanical pumping or syphoning, are not considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.
- Discharges from sediment basins containing a skimmer or standpipe outlet structure that occur as a result of mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- Maintenance is required for safety fencing, vegetation, embankment, inlet and outlet structures, as well as other features.
- Removal of sediment is required when the storage volume is reduced by one-third.

Sediment Trap (See also SE-3)

Description:

- A sediment trap is a temporary basin formed by excavation and/or construction of an earthen embankment across a waterway or low drainage area to detain sediment-laden runoff and allow sediment to settle out before discharging. Sediment traps are smaller than Sediment Basins (SE-2) and do not have a designed outlet (but do have a spillway or overflow).

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of large and medium sized particles (sand and gravel) and some metals that settle out with the sediment.

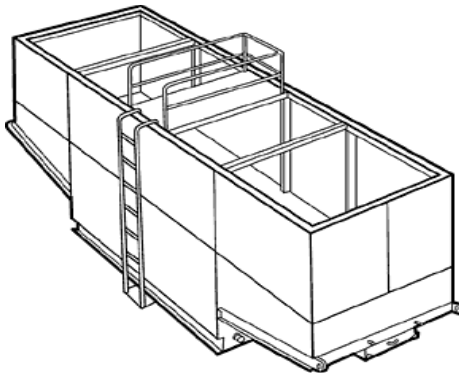
Implementation:

- Excavation and construction of related facilities is required.
- Trap inlets should be located to maximize the travel distance to the trap outlet.
- Use rock or vegetation to protect the trap outlets against erosion.
- Discharges from sediment traps containing a skimmer or standpipe outlet structure that occur as a result of gravity flow with no mechanical pumping or syphoning are not considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.
- Discharges from sediment traps containing a skimmer or standpipe outlet structure that occur as a result of mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- Maintenance is required for vegetation, embankment, inlet and outfall structures, as well as other features.
- Removal of sediment is required when the storage volume is reduced by one-third.

Weir Tanks



Description:

- A weir tank separates water and waste by using weirs. The configuration of the weirs (over and under weirs) maximizes the residence time in the tank and determines the waste to be removed from the water, such as oil, grease, and sediments.

Appropriate Applications:

- The tank removes trash, some settleable solids (gravel, sand, and silt), some visible oil and grease, and some metals (removed with sediment). To achieve high levels of flow, multiple tanks can be used in parallel. If additional treatment is desired, the tanks can be placed in series or as pre-treatment for other methods.

Implementation:

- Tanks are delivered to the site by the vendor, who can provide assistance with set-up and operation.
- Tank size will depend on flow volume, constituents of concern, and residency period required. Vendors should be consulted to appropriately size tank.
- Treatment capacity (i.e., volume and number of tanks) should provide at a minimum the required volume for discrete particle settling for treatment design flows.
- Discharges from weir tanks that occur as a result of gravity flow with no mechanical pumping or syphoning are not considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.
- Discharges from weir tanks that occur as a result of mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- Periodic cleaning is required based on visual inspection or reduced flow.

- Use a licensed waste disposal company to dispose of oil and grease.

Dewatering Tanks



Description:

- A dewatering tank removes debris and sediment. Flow enters the tank through the top, passes through a fabric filter, and is discharged through the bottom of the tank. The filter separates the solids from the liquids.

Appropriate Applications:

- The tank removes trash, gravel, sand, and silt, some visible oil and grease, and some metals (removed with sediment). To achieve high levels of flow, multiple tanks can be used in parallel. If additional treatment is desired, the tanks can be placed in series or as pre-treatment for other methods.

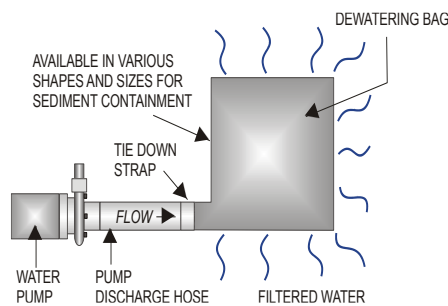
Implementation:

- Tanks are delivered to the site by the vendor, who can provide assistance with set-up and operation.
- Tank size will depend on flow volume, constituents of concern, and residency period required. Vendors should be consulted to appropriately size tank.
- Discharges from dewatering tanks through mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- Periodic cleaning is required based on visual inspection or reduced flow.
- Use a licensed waste disposal company to dispose of oil and grease.

Gravity Bag Filter



Description:

- A gravity bag filter, also referred to as a dewatering bag, is a square or rectangular bag made of non-woven geotextile fabric that collects gravel, sand, silt, and fines.

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of sediments (gravel, sand, and silt). Gravity bag filters may be ineffective for the removal of fines and clays, especially in the initial stages of discharge.
- Some metals are removed with the sediment.

Implementation:

- Water is pumped into one side of the bag and seeps through the top, bottom, and sides of the bag.
- Place the filter bag on pavement or a gravel bed or paved surface. Avoid placing a dewatering bag on unprotected bare soil. If placing the bag on bare soil is unavoidable, a secondary barrier should be used, such as a rock filter bed placed beneath and beyond the edges of the bag to prevent erosion and capture sediments that escape the bag.
- Implement perimeter controls around the downstream end of the bag. Secondary sediment controls are important especially in the initial stages of discharge, which tend to allow fines to pass through the bag.
- Discharges from filter bags through gravity flow are not considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- Inspections of the flow conditions, bag condition, bag capacity, and the secondary barrier (as applicable) are required as per the manufacturer's recommendation.
- Replace the bag when it no longer filters sediment or passes water at a reasonable rate.
- Caution should be taken when removing and disposing of the bag, to prevent the release of captured sediment.

- Properly dispose of the bag offsite. If sediment is removed from the bag prior to disposal (bags can potentially be reused depending upon their condition), dispose of sediment in accordance with the general maintenance procedures described in this BMP Fact Sheet.

Sand Media Particulate Filter



Description:

- Water is treated by passing it through canisters filled with sand media. Generally, sand filters provide a final level of treatment. They are often used as a secondary or higher level of treatment after a significant amount of sediment and other pollutants have been removed using other methods.

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of trash, gravel, sand, and silt, and some metals, as well as the reduction of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and turbidity.
- Sand filters can be used for stand-alone treatment or in conjunction with bag and cartridge filtration if further treatment is required.
- Sand filters can also be used to provide additional treatment to water treated via settling or basic filtration.

Implementation:

- The filters require delivery to the site and initial set up. The vendor can provide assistance with installation and operation.
- Discharges from sand filters through mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- The filters require regular service to monitor and maintain the level of the sand media. If subjected to high loading rates, filters can plug quickly.
- Vendors generally provide data on maximum head loss through the filter. Monitor the filter daily while in use and cleaned when head loss reaches target levels.

- If cleaned by backwashing, the backwash water may need to be hauled away for disposal or returned to the upper end of the treatment train for another pass through the series of dewatering BMPs.

Pressurized Bag Filter



Description:

- A pressurized bag filter is a unit composed of single filter bags made from polyester felt material. The water filters through the unit and is discharged through a header. Vendors provide bag filters in a variety of configurations. Some units include a combination of bag filters and cartridge filters for enhanced contaminant removal.

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of sediment (sand and silt) and some metals, as well as the reduction of BOD, turbidity, and hydrocarbons. Oil absorbent bags are available for hydrocarbon removal.
- Filters can be used to provide secondary treatment to water treated via settling or basic filtration.

Implementation:

- The filters require delivery to the site and initial set up. The vendor can provide assistance with installation and operation.
- Discharges from pressurized bag filter through mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- The filter bags require replacement when the pressure differential equals or exceeds the manufacturer's recommendation.

Cartridge Filter



Description:

- Cartridge filters provide a high degree of pollutant removal by utilizing a number of individual cartridges as part of a larger filtering unit. They are often used as a secondary or higher (polishing) level of treatment after a significant amount of sediment and other pollutants are removed. Units come with various cartridge configurations (for use in series with bag filters) or with a larger single cartridge filtration unit (with multiple filters within).

Appropriate Applications:

- Effective for the removal of sediment (sand, silt, and some clays) and metals, as well as the reduction of BOD, turbidity, and hydrocarbons. Hydrocarbons can effectively be removed with special resin cartridges.
- Filters can be used to provide secondary treatment to water treated via settling or basic filtration.

Implementation:

- The filters require delivery to the site and initial set up. The vendor can provide assistance.
- Discharges from cartridge filters through mechanical pumping or syphoning are considered dewatering practices that would trigger the requirements of Attachment J.

Maintenance:

- The cartridges require replacement when the pressure differential equals or exceeds the manufacturer's recommendation.

References and Additional Resources

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2024. Construction Site Best Management Practices (BMPs) Manual CTSW-RT-24-425.11.1.

California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). 2022. Order 2022-0057-DWQ, NPDES General Permit No. CAS000002: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Stormwater Discharges Associated with Construction and Land Disturbance Activities (General Permit).

California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). 2024. Dewatering Discharge Notification Guidance available at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/construction.html

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). 2007. Developing Your Pollution Prevention Plan, EPA 833-R-06-004.