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**Title 40 —Protection of Environment**  
**Chapter I —Environmental Protection Agency**  
**Subchapter H —Ocean Dumping**

**Part 232** 404 Program Definitions; Exempt Activities Not Requiring 404 Permits

§ 232.1 Purpose and scope of this part.

§ 232.2 Definitions.

§ 232.3 Activities not requiring permits.

## **PART 232—404 PROGRAM DEFINITIONS; EXEMPT ACTIVITIES NOT REQUIRING 404 PERMITS**

**Authority:** 33 U.S.C. 1251 *et seq.*

**Source:** 53 FR 20773, June 6, 1988, unless otherwise noted.

### **§ 232.1 Purpose and scope of this part.**

Part 232 contains definitions applicable to the section 404 program for discharges of dredged or fill material. These definitions apply to both the federally operated program and State administered programs after program approval. This part also describes those activities which are exempted from regulation. Regulations prescribing the substantive environmental criteria for issuance of section 404 permits appear at 40 CFR part 230. Regulations establishing procedures to be followed by the EPA in denying or restricting a disposal site appear at 40 CFR part 231. Regulations containing the procedures and policies used by the Corps in administering the 404 program appear at 33 CFR parts 320-330. Regulations specifying the procedures EPA will follow, and the criteria EPA will apply in approving, monitoring, and withdrawing approval of section 404 State programs appear at 40 CFR part 233.

### **§ 232.2 Definitions.**

Link to an amendment published at 89 FR 103501, Dec. 18, 2024.

**Administrator** means the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency or an authorized representative.

**Application** means a form for applying for a permit to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the United States.

**Approved program** means a State program which has been approved by the Regional Administrator under part 233 of this chapter or which is deemed approved under section 404(h)(3), 33 U.S.C. 1344(h)(3).

*Best management practices* (BMPs) means schedules of activities, prohibitions of practices, maintenance procedures, and other management practices to prevent or reduce the pollution of waters of the United States from discharges of dredged or fill material. BMPs include methods, measures, practices, or design and performance standards which facilitate compliance with the section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (40 CFR part 230), effluent limitations or prohibitions under section 307(a), and applicable water quality standards.

*Discharge of dredged material.*

- (1) Except as provided below in paragraph (2), 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, associated with a dredging operation, 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 landclearing, ditching, channelization, or other excavation.
- (2) 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.
  - (ii) Activities that involve only the cutting or removing of vegetation above the ground (e.g., mowing, rotary cutting, and chainsawing) 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.
- (3) 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 U.S. as defined in paragraphs (4) and (5) of this definition; however, this exception does not apply to any person preparing to undertake mechanized landclearing, 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 (4) and (5) of this definition. The person proposing to undertake mechanized landclearing, 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, defined as dredging for navigation in *navigable waters of the United States*, as that term is defined in 33 CFR part 329, with proper authorization from the Congress or the Corps pursuant to 33 CFR part 322; however, this exception is not applicable to dredging activities in wetlands, as that term is defined at § 232.2(r) of this chapter.
- (iii) Certain discharges, such as those associated with normal farming, silviculture, and ranching activities, are not prohibited by or otherwise subject to regulation under Section 404. See 40 CFR 232.3 for discharges that do not require permits.
- (4) 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.

- (5) 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.

#### *Discharge of fill material.*

- (1) 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 subaqueous 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;" after the words "utility lines; and artificial reefs.
- (2) In addition, 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 waterbody; 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.
  - (i) 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 powerline 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 33 CFR part 329, require authorization under section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (see 33 CFR part 322).

(ii) [Reserved]

**Dredged material** means material that is excavated or dredged from waters of the United States.

**Effluent** means dredged material or fill material, including return flow from confined sites.

**Federal Indian reservation** means all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and including rights-of-way running through the reservation.

**Fill material.**

- (1) Except as specified in paragraph (3) of this definition, 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.

**General permit** means a permit authorizing a category of discharges of dredged or fill material under the Act. General permits are permits for categories of discharge which are similar in nature, will cause only minimal adverse environmental effects when performed separately, and will have only minimal cumulative adverse effect on the environment.

**Indian Tribe** means any Indian Tribe, band, group, or community recognized by the Secretary of the Interior and exercising governmental authority over a Federal Indian reservation.

**Owner or operator** means the owner or operator of any activity subject to regulation under the 404 program.

**Permit** means a written authorization issued by an approved State to implement the requirements of part 233, or by the Corps under 33 CFR parts 320-330. When used in these regulations, “permit” includes “general permit” as well as individual permit.

**Person** means an individual, association, partnership, corporation, municipality, State or Federal agency, or an agent or employee thereof.

**Regional Administrator** means the Regional Administrator of the appropriate Regional Office of the Environmental Protection Agency or the authorized representative of the Regional Administrator.

**Secretary** means the Secretary of the Army acting through the Chief of Engineers.

**State** means any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or an Indian Tribe as defined in this part, which meet the requirements of § 233.60.

**State regulated waters** means those waters of the United States in which the Corps suspends the issuance of section 404 permits upon approval of a State's section 404 permit program by the Administrator under section 404(h). 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. All other waters of the United States in a State with an approved program shall be under jurisdiction of the State program, and shall be identified in the program description as required by part 233.

**Waters of the United States** means the term as it is defined in § 120.2 of this chapter.

[53 FR 20773, June 6, 1988, as amended at 58 FR 8182, Feb. 11, 1993; 58 FR 45037, Aug. 25, 1993; 64 FR 25123, May 10, 1999; 66 FR 4575, Jan. 17, 2001; 67 FR 31142, May 9, 2002; 73 FR 79645, Dec. 30, 2008; 80 FR 37117, June 29, 2015; 83 FR 5209, Feb. 6, 2018; 84 FR 56670, Oct. 22, 2019; 85 FR 22341, Apr. 21, 2020]

### § 232.3 Activities not requiring permits.

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

- (a) If any discharge of dredged or fill material resulting from the activities listed in paragraph (c) of this section contains any toxic pollutant listed under section 307 of the Act, such discharge shall be subject to any applicable toxic effluent standard or prohibition, and shall require a section 404 permit.
- (b) Any discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States incidental to any of the activities identified in paragraph (c) 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 discernable alterations to flow or circulation, the presumption is that flow or circulation may be impaired by such alteration.

Note: 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 section 404 wetland to a non-wetland is a change in use of an area of waters of the U.S. 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.

- (c) The following activities are exempt from section 404 permit requirements, except as specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section:

- (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 (d) of this section.
- (ii)
  - (A) To fall under this exemption, the activities specified in paragraph (c)(1) of this section must be part of an established (i.e., ongoing) farming, silviculture, or ranching operation, and must be in accordance with definitions in paragraph (d) of this section. Activities on areas lying fallow as part of a conventional rotational cycle are part of an established operation.
  - (B) 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 in 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 operation. 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 was part of an established farming, silviculture or ranching operation.
- (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. Discharge associated with siphons, pumps, headgates, wingwalls, wiers, 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 United States. 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 Act which meets the requirements of section 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. The BMPs which must be applied to satisfy this provision 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 United States 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 United States;
  - (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 to prevent erosion during and following construction;
  - (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 the 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 United States 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.
- (d) For purpose of paragraph (c)(1) of this section, cultivating, harvesting, minor drainage, plowing, and seeding are defined as follows:
- (1) 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.

- (2) 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.
- (3)
  - (i) Minor drainage means:
    - (A) 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 (dryland) 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;
    - (B) The discharge of dredged or fill material for the purpose of installing ditching or other 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;
    - (C) 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 the Act, and which are in established use for the production of rice, cranberries, or other wetland crop species.

Note: The provisions of paragraphs (d)(3)(i) (B) and (C) 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.

- (D) The discharge 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 drainageways 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 drainageway as it existed prior to the formation of the blockage. Removal must be accomplished within one year after such blockages are discovered in order to be eligible for exemption.
  - (ii) Minor drainage in waters of the United States 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 adequate 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.

- (4) Plowing means all forms of primary tillage, including moldboard, chisel, or wide-blade plowing, disking, harrowing, and similar physical means used 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. Plowing 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 dryland. 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.
  - (5) 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.
- (e) Federal projects which qualify under the criteria contained in section 404(r) of the Act are exempt from section 404 permit requirements, but may be subject to other State or Federal requirements.