

Concept

Revisions to Allow Electronic Submittal of Documents (556)

Reason for Action

To update the air quality rules in 15A NCAC, Subchapters 02D and 02Q, to allow digital documents and electronic submittals where physical hard copies are currently required.

Scope/Nature/Summary

Some of the current air quality rules in 15A NCAC, Subchapters 02D and 02Q, require physical copies of correspondence, records, and applications. In some instances, regulated entities are required to provide multiple copies of these documents, to be used by the Division of Air Quality (DAQ) for notifying affected states and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In other rules, certain forms are required to be submitted with the original signature of the responsible official or are required to be postmarked by a certain date, both of which imply a hard copy submittal is expected. Additionally, some rules do not specify the format of correspondence and records.

In March of 2020, with many DAQ staff working remotely in response to the pandemic, the DAQ established an email address for electronic submittals of permit applications and reports. However, hard copies are still required per the applicable rules. Electronic submittals provide greater accessibility for staff that are located throughout the state and save resources for both the state and regulated community.

The DEQ is finalizing the development of a digital document repository that uses Laserfiche (secure digital content management software). This repository will be the location of official agency records and will have an interface through which public documents can be accessed remotely. For documents received in hard copy format, agency staff scan the documents using optical character recognition (OCR) software and then upload the record into the database. Depending on the quality of the document and scan, this can sometimes lead to imperfect character recognition and searching capabilities for such documents. Records received in electronic format often save staff time and resources otherwise spent preparing the document for upload into Laserfiche, and lead to a better quality electronic record for public viewing and searching.

To provide greater accessibility and conserve resources, the DAQ is proposing to revise the applicable rules in Subchapters 02D and 02Q to allow electronic submittals of permit applications, reports, forms, and other documentation, as appropriate.

Statutory Authority

G.S. 143-215.3(a)(1); G.S. 143-215.107; G.S. 143-215.108;