

STATE OF LOUISIANA

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

IN THE MATTER OF:

**NATIONAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE,
LLC**

AI # 41313, 118381, 93819

**PROCEEDINGS UNDER THE LOUISIANA
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT
LA. R.S. 30:2001, ET SEQ.**

* **Settlement Tracking No.**

* **SA-WE-24-0011**

*

*

* **Enforcement Tracking No.**

* **WE-CN-21-00342**

*

*

* **Docket No. 2022-8582-DEQ**

*

SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

The following Settlement Agreement is hereby agreed to between National Water Infrastructure, LLC (“Respondent”) and the Department of Environmental Quality (“DEQ” or “the Department”), under authority granted by the Louisiana Environmental Quality Act, La. R.S. 30:2001, et seq. (“the Act”).

I

Respondent is a limited liability company that owns and/or operates a sanitary treatment plant located in Geismar, Ascension Parish, Louisiana (“the Facility”).

II

On August 23, 2021, the Department issued to Respondent a Consolidated Compliance Order & Notice of Potential Penalty, Enforcement Tracking No. WE-CN-21-00342 (Exhibit 1).

The following violations, although not cited in the foregoing enforcement action, are included within the scope of this settlement:

During an inspection conducted on or about March 15, 2022, it was revealed that the Respondent failed to properly operate and maintain the treatment facility. Specifically, a build-up of

solids were observed in the chlorine contact chamber that were noted to be very close to the surface of the wastewater. This a violation of LAC 33:IX.2701.E.

During an inspection conducted on or about March 15, 2022, it was revealed that the Respondent caused and/or allowed the presence of sludge in the receiving stream. Specifically, a large amount of sludge buildup was observed in the receiving stream, which was noted on both the eastern and western sides of the outfall pipe. Sludge was also noted covering half of the width of the receiving stream in locations within the immediate area of the outfall pipe. Bloodworms were also noted throughout the sludge within the receiving stream, which is indicative of stagnant water containing organic matter commonly associated with sanitary waste. This is a violation of LAC 33:IX.501.C & 1113.B.1.

III

In response to the Consolidated Compliance Order & Notice of Potential Penalty, Respondent made a timely request for a hearing.

IV

Respondent denies it committed any violations or that it is liable for any fines, forfeitures and/or penalties.

V

Nonetheless, Respondent, without making any admission of liability under state or federal statute or regulation, agrees to pay, and the Department agrees to accept, a payment in the amount of TEN THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND NO/100 DOLLARS (\$10,500.00), of which Two Thousand Three Hundred Seventeen and 75/100 Dollars (\$2,317.75) represents the Department's enforcement costs, in settlement of the claims set forth in this Settlement Agreement. The total amount of money expended by Respondent on cash payments to the Department as described above,

shall be considered a civil penalty for tax purposes, as required by La. R.S. 30:2050.7(E)(1).

VI

Respondent further agrees that the Department may consider the inspection report(s), the Consolidated Compliance Order & Notice of Potential Penalty and this Settlement Agreement for the purpose of determining compliance history in connection with any future enforcement or permitting action by the Department against Respondent, and in any such action Respondent shall be estopped from objecting to the above-referenced documents being considered as proving the violations alleged herein for the sole purpose of determining Respondent's compliance history.

VII

This Settlement Agreement shall be considered a final order of the Secretary for all purposes, including, but not limited to, enforcement under La. R.S. 30:2025(G)(2), and Respondent hereby waives any right to administrative or judicial review of the terms of this agreement, except such review as may be required for interpretation of this Settlement Agreement in any action by the Department to enforce this Settlement Agreement.

VIII

This Settlement Agreement is being made in the interest of settling the state's claims and avoiding for both parties the expense and effort involved in litigation or an adjudicatory hearing. In agreeing to the compromise and Settlement Agreement, the Department considered the factors for issuing civil penalties set forth in La. R. S. 30:2025(E) of the Act.

IX

As required by law, the Department has submitted this Settlement Agreement to the Louisiana Attorney General for approval or rejection. The Attorney General's concurrence is appended to this Settlement Agreement.

X

The Respondent has caused a public notice advertisement to be placed in the official journal of the parish governing authority in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. The advertisement, in form and wording approved by the Department, announced the availability of this Settlement Agreement for public view and comment and the opportunity for a public hearing. Respondent has submitted an original proof-of-publication affidavit and an original public notice to the Department and, as of the date this Settlement Agreement is executed on behalf of the Department, more than forty-five (45) days have elapsed since publication of the notice.

XI

Payment is to be made within thirty (30) days from notice of the Secretary's signature. If payment is not received within that time, this Settlement Agreement is voidable at the option of the Department. The Respondent shall provide its tax identification number when submitting payment. Payments are to be made by check, payable to the Department of Environmental Quality, and mailed or delivered to the attention of Accountant Administrator, Financial Services Division, Department of Environmental Quality, Post Office Box 4303, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70821-4303. Each payment shall be accompanied by a completed Settlement Payment Form attached hereto.

XII

In consideration of the above, any claims for penalties are hereby compromised and settled in accordance with the terms of this Settlement Agreement.

XIII

Each undersigned representative of the parties certifies that he or she is fully authorized to execute this Settlement Agreement on behalf of his or her respective party, and to legally bind such party to its terms and conditions.

**NATIONAL WATER
INFRASTRUCTURE, LLC**

BY: _____
(Signature)

(Printed)

TITLE: _____

THUS DONE AND SIGNED in duplicate original before me this _____ day of _____, 20_____, at _____.

NOTARY PUBLIC (ID # _____)

(stamped or printed)

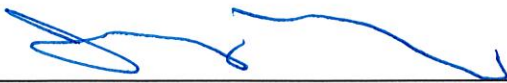
**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**
Aurelia S. Giacometto, Secretary

BY: _____
Jerrie "Jerry" Lang, Assistant Secretary
Office of Environmental Compliance


THUS DONE AND SIGNED in duplicate original before me this _____ day of _____, 20_____, at Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

NOTARY PUBLIC (ID # _____)

(stamped or printed)

Approved: 

Jerrie "Jerry" Lang, Assistant Secretary

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE ENFORCEMENT DIVISION POST OFFICE BOX 4312 BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70821-4312		CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER & NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY		
Enforcement Tracking No.	WE-CN-21-00342	Certified Mail No.	7019 2970 0000 6032 9395	
Agency Interest (AI) No.	41313, 118381, 93819	Contact Name	Scott B. Pierce	
Alternate ID No.	LAG540275, LAG570308, LAG570439	Contact Phone No.	(225) 219-3723	
Respondent:	National Water Infrastructure, LLC	Facility Names:	Dutchtown Lane Subdivision STP, Dutchtown Villa Subdivision STP, Highlands at Dutchtown Subdivision STP	
	c/o C T Corporation System	Physical Locations:	12322 Dutchtown Ln., 12492 Dutchtown Villa Dr., S side of Hwy. 74 W of intersection of Hwys. 74 & 73	
	Agent for Service of Process 3867 Plaza Tower Dr.	City, State, Zip:	Geismar, LA 70734	
	Baton Rouge, LA 70816	Parish:	Ascension	
This CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER & NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY is issued by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (the Department), under the authority granted by the Louisiana Environmental Quality Act (the Act), La. R.S. 30:2001, et seq., and particularly by La. R.S. 30:2025(C), 30:2050.2 and 30:2050.3(B).				
FINDINGS OF FACT				
An authorized representative of the Department inspected the abovementioned facility or conducted a file review of the facility to determine the degree of compliance with regulations promulgated in the Louisiana Administrative Code, Title 33. The State regulatory citations for the violation(s) identified during the inspection and/or file review are indicated below.				
I.	AI No. 41313: The Respondent owns and/or operates a sanitary treatment plant (STP) located at 12322 Dutchtown Ln., Geismar, Ascension Parish, Louisiana. The Respondent was granted authorization under Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (LPDES) General Permit LAG540275 via permit transfer from the previous operator with an effective date of April 9, 2020. LPDES General Permit LAG540275 was originally reauthorized on or about October 19, 2018, and will expire on July 31, 2023. Under the terms and conditions of LPDES General Permit LAG540275, the Respondent is permitted to discharge treated sanitary wastewater into an unnamed ditch, thence into the New River, all waters of the state.			
II.	AI No. 118381: The Respondent owns and/or operates a sanitary treatment plant (STP) located at 12492 Dutchtown Villa Dr., Geismar, Ascension Parish, Louisiana. The Respondent was granted authorization under Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (LPDES) General Permit LAG570308 via permit transfer from the previous operator with an effective date of April 9, 2020. LPDES General Permit LAG570308 was originally reauthorized on or about July 19, 2019, and will expire on June 10, 2024. Under the terms and conditions of LPDES General Permit LAG570308, the Respondent is permitted to discharge treated sanitary wastewater into parish drainage, thence into the New River, thence in the New River Canal, all waters of the state.			
III.	AI No. 93819: The Respondent owns and/or operates a sanitary treatment plant (STP) located on the S side of Hwy. 74, W of intersection of Hwys. 74 & 73., in Geismar, Ascension Parish, Louisiana. The Respondent was granted authorization under Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (LPDES) General Permit LAG570439 via permit transfer from the previous operator with an effective date of April 9, 2020. LPDES General Permit LAG570439 was originally reauthorized on or about July 19, 2019, and will expire on June 10, 2024. Under the terms and conditions of LPDES General Permit LAG570439, the Respondent is permitted to discharge treated sanitary wastewater into the New River, all waters of the state.			
	Date of Violation	Description of Violation		
IV.	Inspection(s) 1/25/2021 1/28/2021 AI No. 41313	The Respondent failed to properly operate and/or maintain the facility and caused and/or allowed the discharge of floating, suspended, and settleable solids in concentrations sufficient to produce visible solids, scum or any formation of long-term bottom deposits of slimes or sludge banks attributable to waste discharges. Specifically, during the inspection conducted on January 25, 2021, pursuant to a citizen's complaint, the Department observed sludge at the point of discharge near the outfall and within the unnamed receiving ditch running perpendicular to Hwy. 74. The Department observed sludge still in the ditch during a follow-up inspection conducted on January 28, 2021. See Inspection Report, Attachment 3, photographs 1 through 22. (LPDES Permit LAG540275 (Part I, Section B, Schedule A, and Part III, Section B.3.a), La. R.S. 30:2076(A)(3), LAC 33:IX.501.C, LAC 33:IX.1113.B.3, and LAC 33:IX.2701.E)		
V.	Inspection(s) 1/25/2021 1/28/2021 AI Nos. 118381 93819	The Respondent failed to properly operate and/or maintain the facility and caused and/or allowed the discharge of floating, suspended, and settleable solids in concentrations sufficient to produce visible solids, scum or any formation of long-term bottom deposits of slimes or sludge banks attributable to waste discharges. Specifically, during the inspection conducted on January 25, 2021, pursuant to a citizen's complaint, the Department observed sludge in the ditch, which receives discharge from both the Dutchtown Villa STP Outfall 001 and the Highlands at Dutchtown STP Outfall 001. The sludge was observed for approximately 1,000 feet within this ditch that runs parallel to Hwy. 74 from east of Highland Dr. and west to Arceneaux Ln. The Department observed sludge still in the ditch during a follow-up inspection conducted on January 28, 2021. See Inspection Report, Attachment 3, photographs 1 through 22. (LPDES Permits LAG570308 or LAG570439 (Part I, Section B, Schedule A, and Part III, Section B.3.a) La. R.S. 30:2076(A)(3), LAC 33:IX.501.C, and LAC 33:IX.1113.B.3, and LAC 33:IX.2701.E)		
ORDER				
Based on the foregoing, the Respondent is hereby ordered to comply with the requirements that are indicated below:				
I.	To take, immediately upon receipt of this COMPLIANCE ORDER, any and all steps necessary to meet and maintain compliance with the Water Quality Regulations. This shall include, but not be limited to; correcting all of the violations described in the "Findings of Fact" portion.			



II.	To submit to the Enforcement Division, within thirty (30) days after receipt of this COMPLIANCE ORDER , a written report that includes a detailed description of the circumstances surrounding the cited violation(s) and actions taken or to be taken to achieve compliance with the "Order" portion of this COMPLIANCE ORDER . This report shall include specific corrective actions to be taken as it pertains to sludge management practices. This report and all other reports or information required to be submitted to the Enforcement Division by this COMPLIANCE ORDER shall be submitted to the Department at the address specified in this document.
III.	To immediately cease, upon receipt of this COMPLIANCE ORDER , any unauthorized discharges from the Respondent's facility to waters of the state.
IV.	To submit to the Enforcement Division, within thirty (30) days after receipt of this COMPLIANCE ORDER , the sludge removal/hauling manifest(s) indicating the amount and destination of the sludge removed regarding the incidents detailed in the Finding of Fact section above as well as the sludge reported on the 2020 sewage sludge and biosolids use or disposal reporting form.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

I.	The Respondent has a right to an adjudicatory hearing on a disputed issue of material fact or of law arising from this COMPLIANCE ORDER . This right may be exercised by filing a written request with the Secretary no later than thirty (30) days after receipt of this COMPLIANCE ORDER .
II.	The request for an adjudicatory hearing shall specify the provisions of the COMPLIANCE ORDER on which the hearing is requested and shall briefly describe the basis for the request. This request should reference the Enforcement Tracking Number and Agency Interest Number, which are located in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of this document and should be directed to the address specified in this document.
III.	Upon the Respondent's timely filing a request for a hearing, a hearing on the disputed issue of material fact or of law regarding this COMPLIANCE ORDER may be scheduled by the Secretary of the Department. The hearing shall be governed by the Act, the Administrative Procedure Act (La. R.S. 49:950, et seq.), and the Division of Administrative Law's (DAL) Procedural Rules. The Department may amend or supplement this COMPLIANCE ORDER prior to the hearing, after providing sufficient notice and an opportunity for the preparation of a defense for the hearing.
IV.	This COMPLIANCE ORDER shall become a final enforcement action unless the request for hearing is timely filed. Failure to timely request a hearing constitutes a waiver of the Respondent's right to a hearing on a disputed issue of material fact or of law under Section 2050.4 of the Act for the violation(s) described herein.
V.	The Respondent's failure to request a hearing or to file an appeal or the Respondent's withdrawal of a request for hearing on this COMPLIANCE ORDER shall not preclude the Respondent from contesting the findings of facts in any subsequent penalty action addressing the same violation(s), although the Respondent is estopped from objecting to this COMPLIANCE ORDER becoming a permanent part of its compliance history.
VI.	Civil penalties of not more than thirty-two thousand five hundred dollars (\$32,500) may be assessed for each day of violation. The Respondent's failure or refusal to comply with this COMPLIANCE ORDER and the provisions herein will subject the Respondent to possible enforcement procedures under La. R.S. 30:2025, which could result in the assessment of a civil penalty in an amount of not more than fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) for each day of continued violation or noncompliance.
VII.	For each violation described herein, the Department reserves the right to seek civil penalties in any manner allowed by law, and nothing herein shall be construed to preclude the right to seek such penalties.

NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY

I.	Pursuant to La. R.S. 30:2050.3(B), you are hereby notified that the issuance of a penalty assessment is being considered for the violation(s) described herein. Written comments may be filed regarding the violation(s) and the contemplated penalty. If you elect to submit comments, it is requested that they be submitted within ten (10) days of receipt of this notice.
II.	Prior to the issuance of additional appropriate enforcement action(s), you may request a meeting with the Department to present any mitigating circumstances concerning the violation(s). If you would like to have such a meeting, please contact Scott B. Pierce at (225) 219-3723 within ten (10) days of receipt of this NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY .
III.	The Department is required by La. R.S. 30:2025(E)(3)(a) to consider the gross revenues of the Respondent and the monetary benefits of noncompliance to determine whether a penalty will be assessed and the amount of such penalty. Please forward the Respondent's most current annual gross revenue statement along with a statement of the monetary benefits of noncompliance for the cited violation(s) to the above named contact person within ten (10) days of receipt of this NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY . Include with your statement of monetary benefits the method(s) you utilized to arrive at the sum. If you assert that no monetary benefits have been gained, you are to fully justify that statement. If the Respondent chooses not to submit the requested most current annual gross revenues statement within ten (10) days, it will be viewed by the Department as an admission that the Respondent has the ability to pay the statutory maximum penalty as outlined in La. R.S. 30:2025.
IV.	This CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER & NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY is effective upon receipt.

CONTACTS AND SUBMITTAL OF INFORMATION

<p>Enforcement Division: Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Office of Environmental Compliance Water Enforcement Division Post Office Box 4312 Baton Rouge, LA 70821 Attn: Scott B. Pierce</p>	<p>Hearing Requests: Department of Environmental Quality Office of the Secretary Post Office Box 4302 Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821-4302 Attn: Hearings Clerk, Legal Division Re: Enforcement Tracking No. WE-CN-21-00342 Agency Interest Nos. 41313, 118381, 93819</p>
<p>Water Permits Division (if necessary): Department of Environmental Quality Office of Environmental Services Post Office Box 4313 Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4313 Attn: Water Permits Division</p>	<p>Physical Address (if hand delivered): Department of Environmental Quality 602 N Fifth Street Baton Rouge, LA 70802</p>

HOW TO REQUEST CLOSURE OF THIS CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER

& NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY

- To appeal the **CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER AND NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY**, the Respondent must follow the guidelines set forth in the "Right to Appeal" portion of this **CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER AND NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY**.
- To request closure of the **COMPLIANCE ORDER** portion, the Respondent must demonstrate compliance with the "Order" portion of this **COMPLIANCE ORDER** by completing the attached "**CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER AND NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY REQUEST TO CLOSE**" form and returning it to the address specified.
 - Before requesting closure of the **COMPLIANCE ORDER** portion, please contact the Financial Services Division at 225-219-3865 or email them at _DEQ-WWWFinancialServices@la.gov to determine if you owe outstanding fees.
- To expedite closure of the **NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY** portion, the Respondent may offer a settlement amount to resolve any claim for civil penalties for the violation(s) described herein.
 - The Department assesses civil penalties based on LAC 33:1.Subpart1.Chapter7.
 - The Respondent may offer a settlement amount but the Department is under no obligation to enter into settlement negotiations. It is decided upon on a discretionary basis.
 - The settlement offer amount may be entered on the attached "**CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER AND NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY REQUEST TO CLOSE**" form. The Respondent must include a justification of the offer.
 - **DO NOT** submit payment of the offer amount with the form. The Department will review the settlement offer and notify the Respondent as to whether the offer is or is not accepted.
 - Before requesting closure of the **NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY** portion, please contact the Financial Services Division at 225-219-3865 or email them at _DEQ-WWWFinancialServices@la.gov to determine if you owe outstanding fees.

If you have questions or need more information, you may contact Scott B. Pierce at (225) 219-3723 or scott.pierce@la.gov.


Lourdes Iturralde
Assistant Secretary
Office of Environmental Compliance

Date: 8/20/2021

ecc: Public Health Chief Officer
Office of Public Health
Department of Health and Hospitals

Attachment(s)

- Request to Close
- Settlement Brochure

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE ENFORCEMENT DIVISION POST OFFICE BOX 4312 BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70821-4312		CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE ORDER & NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY REQUEST TO CLOSE		
Enforcement Tracking No.	WE-CN-21-00342	Contact Name	Scott B. Pierce	
Agency Interest (AI) No.	41313, 118381, 93819	Contact Phone No.	(225) 219-3723	
Alternate ID No.	LAG540275, LAG570308, LAG570439			
Respondent:	National Water Infrastructure, LLC	Facility Names:	Dutchtown Lane Subdivision STP, Dutchtown Villa Subdivision STP, Highlands at Dutchtown Subdivision STP	
	c/o C T Corporation Sytem	Physical Locations:	17322 Dutchtown Ln., 12492 Dutchtown Villa Dr., S side of Hwy. 74 W of Intersection of Hwys. 74 & 73	
	Agent for Service of Process	City, State, Zip:	Geismar, LA 70734	
	3867 Plaza Tower Dr. Baton Rouge, LA 70816	Parish:	Ascension	
STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE				
STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE			Date Completed	Copy Attached?
A written report was submitted in accordance with Paragraph II of the "Order" portion of the COMPLIANCE ORDER.				
All necessary documents were submitted to the Department within 30 days of receipt of the COMPLIANCE ORDER in accordance with Paragraph IV of the "Order" portion of the COMPLIANCE ORDER.				
All items in the "Findings of Fact" portion of the COMPLIANCE ORDER were addressed and the facility is being operated to meet and maintain the requirements of the "Order" portion of the COMPLIANCE ORDER. Final compliance was achieved as of:				
SETTLEMENT OFFER (OPTIONAL)				
<i>(check the applicable option)</i>				
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Respondent is not interested in entering into settlement negotiations with the Department with the understanding that the Department has the right to assess civil penalties based on LAC 33:1.Subpart1.Chapter7.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	In order to resolve any claim for civil penalties for the violations in NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY (WE-CN-21-00342), the Respondent is interested in entering into settlement negotiations with the Department and would like to set up a meeting to discuss settlement procedures.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	In order to resolve any claim for civil penalties for the violations in NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY (WE-CN-21-00342), the Respondent is interested in entering into settlement negotiations with the Department and offers to pay \$ _____ which shall include LDEQ enforcement costs and any monetary benefit of non-compliance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monetary component = \$ _____ • Beneficial Environmental Project (BEP) component (optional)= \$ _____ • DO NOT SUBMIT PAYMENT OF THE OFFER WITH THIS FORM- the Department will review the settlement offer and notify the Respondent as to whether the offer is or is not accepted. The Respondent has reviewed the violations noted in NOTICE OF POTENTIAL PENALTY (WE-CN-21-00342) and has attached a justification of its offer and a description of any BEPs if included in settlement offer.			
CERTIFICATION STATEMENT				
I certify, under provisions in Louisiana and United States law that provide criminal penalties for false statements, that based on information and belief formed after reasonable inquiry, the statements and information attached and the compliance statement above, are true, accurate, and complete. I also certify that I do not owe outstanding fees or penalties to the Department for this facility or any other facility I own or operate. I further certify that I am either the Respondent or an authorized representative of the Respondent.				
Respondent's Signature		Respondent's Printed Name		Respondent's Title
Respondent's Physical Address			Respondent's Phone #	Date
MAIL COMPLETED DOCUMENT TO THE ADDRESS BELOW:				
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Office of Environmental Compliance Enforcement Division Post Office Box 4312 Baton Rouge, LA 70821 Attn: Scott B. Pierce				

If you have questions or need more information, you may contact Scott B. Pierce at (225) 219-3723 or scott.pierce@la.gov.

GET THE POINT ON SETTLEMENTS

WHAT IS A SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT?

Once the Department has determined that a penalty is warranted for a violation, the Assistant Secretary of the Department, with the concurrence of the Attorney General, may enter into a settlement agreement with the Respondent as a means to resolve the Department's claim for a penalty.

HOW DOES THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT PROCESS WORK?

To begin the settlement agreement process, the Department must receive a written settlement offer. Once this offer is submitted, it is sent for approval by the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Environmental Compliance. The formal Settlement Agreement is drafted and sent to the Attorney General's office where the Attorney General has a 90 day concurrence period. During this time, the Respondent is required to run a public notice in an official journal and/or newspaper of general circulation in each affected parish. After which, a 45 day public comment period is opened to allow the public to submit comments. Once the Department has received concurrence, the settlement agreement is signed by both parties. The Department then forwards a letter to the responsible party to establish a payment plan and/or beneficial environmental project (BEP).

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN A SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT?

The Department uses the penalty determination method defined in LAC 33:1.705 as a guideline to accepting settlement offers. The penalty matrix is used to determine a penalty range for each violation based on the two violation specific factors, the nature and gravity of the violation and the degree of risk/impact to human health and property.

		NATURE AND GRAVITY OF THE VIOLATION		
		MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR
DEGREE OF RISK OR IMPACT TO HUMAN HEALTH OR PROPERTY	MAJOR	\$32,500 to \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$15,000	\$15,000 to \$11,000
	MODERATE	\$11,000 to \$8,000	\$8,000 to \$5,000	\$5,000 to \$3,000
	MINOR	\$3,000 to \$1,500	\$1,500 to \$500	\$500 to \$100

Degree of Risk to Human Health or Property

Major: (actual measurable harm or substantial risk of harm) A violation of major impact to an environmental resource or a hazard characterized by high volume and/or frequent occurrence and/or high pollutant concentration.

Moderate: (potential for measurable detrimental impact) A violation of moderate impact and hazard may be one characterized by occasional occurrence and/or pollutant concentration that may be expected to have a detrimental effect under certain conditions

Minor: (no harm or risk of harm) A violation of minor impact are isolated single incidences and that cause no measurable detrimental effect or are administrative in nature.

Nature and Gravity of the Violation

Major: Violations of statutes, regulations, orders, permit limits, or permit requirements that result in negating the intent of the requirement to such an extent that little or no implementation of requirements occurred.

Moderate: Violations that result in substantially negating the intent of the requirements, but some implementation of the requirements occurred.

Minor: Violations that result in some deviation from the intent of the requirement; however, substantial implementation is demonstrated.

The range is adjusted using the following violator specific factors:

1. history of previous violations or repeated noncompliance;
2. gross revenues generated by the respondent;
3. degree of culpability, recalcitrance, defiance, or indifference to regulations or orders;
4. whether the Respondent has failed to mitigate or to make a reasonable attempt to mitigate the damages caused by the violation; and
5. whether the violation and the surrounding circumstances were immediately reported to the department, and whether the violation was concealed or there was an attempt to conceal by the Respondent.



SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS

Given the previous information, the following formula is used to obtain a penalty amount.

$$\text{Penalty Event Total} = \text{Penalty Event Minimum} + (\text{Adjustment Percentage} \times (\text{Penalty Event Maximum} - \text{Penalty Event Minimum}))$$

After this, the Department adds any monetary benefit of noncompliance to the penalty event. In the event that a monetary benefit is gained due to the delay of a cost that is ultimately paid, the Department adds the applicable judicial interest. Finally, the Department adds all response costs including, but not limited to, the cost of conducting inspections, and the staff time devoted to the preparation of reports and issuing enforcement actions.

WHAT IS A BEP?

A BEP is a project that provides for environmental mitigation which the respondent is not otherwise legally required to perform, but which the defendant/respondent agrees to undertake as a component of the settlement agreement. Project categories for BEPs include public health, pollution prevention, pollution reduction, environmental restoration and protection, assessments and audits, environmental compliance promotion, and emergency planning, preparedness and response. Other projects may be considered if the Department determines that these projects have environmental merit and is otherwise fully consistent with the intent of the BEP regulations.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY OFFER IS REJECTED?

If an offer is rejected by the Assistant Secretary, the Legal Division will contact the responsible party, or anyone designated as an appropriate contact in the settlement offer, to discuss any discrepancies.

WHERE CAN I FIND EXAMPLES AND MORE INFORMATION?

- Settlement Offers searchable in EDMS using the following filters
Media: Air Quality, Function: Enforcement, Description: Settlement
- Settlement Agreements Enforcement Division's website
specific examples can be provided upon request
- Penalty Determination Method LAC 33:I Chapter 7
- Beneficial Environmental Projects LAC 33:I Chapter 25
FAQs
- Judicial Interest..... provided by the Louisiana State Bar Association

