



Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

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Volunteer Monitoring Program

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) began coordinating with external monitoring organizations in 1998. Partnerships built from a robust volunteer monitoring program play an instrumental role by:

- Supplementing DEQ's monitoring network to improve monitoring efficiency and effectiveness
- Alerting the agency to potential pollution issues
- Providing data to establish ambient Documenting water quality improvement projects
- Serving as an important resource for fostering stewardship, and water quality education and outreach

How does DEQ use volunteer monitoring data?

DEQ reviews and classifies volunteer monitoring data into three levels based on quality assurance. Data owners must also notify DEQ of their data use preferences prior to submission to DEQ.

Level I: data have no quality assurance or numeric VA water quality standard for the parameter. Data are used for educational purposes, or to identify potential water quality concerns.

Level II: data have a quality assurance plan and standard operating procedures. In addition to Level I uses, data are used to identify water for follow up monitoring by DEQ and to track performance following TMDL implementation.

Level III: data have a quality assurance plan and standard operating procedures and are audited to confirm adherence to protocols. In addition to Level I and Level II uses, data are used for water quality assessments in accordance with DEQ's Water Quality Assessment Guidance Manual.

There are several restrictions to the use of monitoring partner data in DEQ water quality programs. Partner data are not used in enforcement actions, or for ambient water quality assessment if collected in mixing zones or at the discharge pipe from permitted discharges.

What is a mixing zone?

A mixing zone is an area where wastewater discharged from a permitted facility enters and mixes with a water body. More information on mixing zones is available via the Virginia Administrative Code, 9VAC25-260-20.B, or at the following website:

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title9/agency25/chapter260/section20/>



Citizen Monitoring Grant Program

This grant program was established by a General Assembly budget amendment in 1999. In a typical fiscal year, the General Assembly will appropriate up to \$88,000 in grant funds for eligible activities by volunteer monitoring organizations in Virginia. The two primary goals of the grant program are:

- To generate volunteer collected water quality data that can be used by the agency for water quality assessment, improvement, or preservation
- To educate stakeholders on water quality monitoring and the environment

The application period typically opens in the early summer and runs through August 31. Funded projects can commence at the beginning of the year in January.

If monitoring partner data indicate a potential issue, how does DEQ respond?

Monitoring partner data that suggest a potential pollution issue may be prioritized for follow-up monitoring. This may entail prioritizing monitoring for DEQ staff to further characterize or understand the circumstance or advising the agency's water compliance program if a point source discharge may be involved.

From 2015-2020, monitoring partner data was used to assess 4,036 miles of streams/ivers, 257 square miles of estuary, and 38,272 acres of lakes!

How can the public nominate waterbodies for DEQ monitoring?

Each January through April, DEQ's Water Monitoring and Assessment Program solicits input from the public on the agency's annual monitoring plan. DEQ will review each request based on staff availability, if recent monitoring has occurred in the waterbody, and if the request falls under the agency's ambient monitoring programs. If the agency can honor the nomination, sampling will occur in the following calendar year.

As such, private ponds, privately owned lakes, and any other body of water with restricted public access are not eligible for the nomination process.

For more information on DEQ's volunteer monitoring program please [visit our webpage](#). You can also reach out directly to DEQ by contacting us at citizenwater@deq.virginia.gov



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