Dashboard
January – June 2020

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response and Guidance

A unique challenge for Ohio EPA during the first part of the year has been maintaining our core functions and a high level of productivity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. During these unprecedented times, our ability to continue so much of our core work and complete projects that will yield long-term benefits for our Agency and the state is due to the commitment and hard work of our team at Ohio EPA.

With the onset of COVID 19 and the Governor's declaration of a state of emergency in Ohio, Ohio EPA was aware that regulated entities may be impacted from a reduced workforce necessary to maintain normal operations at some facilities.

All regulated entities remain obligated to take all available actions necessary to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and permit requirements to protect the health and safety of Ohioans and the environment. However, in the instance where regulated entities will have an unavoidable noncompliance situation, directly due to impact from the coronavirus, Ohio EPA created a form for permit holders to request regulatory flexibility. Form submittals were monitored daily and Ohio EPA worked diligently to expeditiously review and respond to incoming requests. When appropriate, the Agency worked with the permittee to find alternative approaches to maintaining compliance, such as extending reporting deadlines, consideration of waiving late fees and exercising enforcement discretion. Where alternative compliance options were authorized, regulated entities were required to maintain records adequate to document activities related to the noncompliance and details of the regulated entity's best efforts to comply.

In addition, the Division of Surface Water and Division of Materials and Waste Management created individual webpages to house information and updates specific to COVID-19 response, including details about how to contact and submit information to the Agency.

Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water

Of specific concern during the pandemic was ensuring that as many Ohioans as possible had access to drinking water as they followed the stay-at-home order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On March 31, 2020, Ohio EPA issued orders to requiring public water systems to maintain service to customers. The order was lifted on July 13. To assist public water systems, the Division of Drinking and Ground Waters (DDAGW) created a webpage with important updates and information about operations, monitoring, and reporting during the pandemic. The webpage is updated frequently and has been a valuable tool in ensuring that water systems receive information quickly. The Agency also created a video to thank drinking water operators for their efforts to maintain operations for their customers.

Working from Home

For the past few years, Ohio EPA has been building our technology infrastructure to better enable staff to capture data and information during field work and inspections. Thanks to that effort, many employees were able to quickly transition to the teleworking environment, with access to technology, resources and software applications to seamlessly perform many of their job duties, such as reviewing and processing permits, issuing authorizations and corresponding with our regulated entities and the public.

The use of Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings and group collaboration has allowed staff to communicate virtually and stay connected and engaged while working from home.

The Agency has also worked hard to provide important information and updates to employees through the Agency's intranet and employee newsletter. Tips for coping with the many challenges to working remotely, along with information about the State's pandemic response have been communicated through these methods as well as email. Staff meet with their management regularly to discuss workloads and coordinate with each other to ensure that projects are completed on time.

Ohio EPA's eBusiness portal and the many division-specific online applications have helped support a seamless transition for our external customers and their ability to do business with us online during the pandemic. Through these online services, regulated entities can complete and submit applications and other authorizations necessary to start, maintain and grow their operations in Ohio. With dual access to these services by both businesses and Ohio EPA staff, the Agency has been able to review and issue permits throughout the pandemic. In addition, the Agency has successfully orchestrated virtual public meetings and information sessions to keep citizens informed of various projects and permitting actions. The Agency has also continued its focus on processing incoming No Further Action (NFA) documentation for remediation activities on brownfield sites to support economic development in these challenging times.

There are ongoing opportunities for advancing our use of technologies, however, because of the work of our IT and technical teams internally over the past many years, Ohio EPA has been well positioned to adapt quickly to the remote work environment to remain highly functional and serve our customers. The following sections highlight some examples of recent technology advancements.

Electronic Plan Software

Ohio EPA receives thousands of detailed plans a year for water and wastewater system improvements, as well as for solid and hazardous waste facilities. To ensure that the regulated community could continue to meet their permit obligations, the Agency implemented an electronic detailed engineering plan submission and review process (ePlan).

ePlan is an engineering plan review solution that allows regulated users to submit detailed plans and fee payments electronically. This system not only allows for faster submittal and receipt of information, but also provides a cost savings to the regulated community, who no longer need to print and mail plans, but also to the Agency as materials are already electronically scanned and easily stored after reviews are complete.

The ePlan review system routes plans to the respective divisions then on to assigned reviewers who can review and mark plans in parallel, while the system tracks review decisions. ePlan tools include magnification and panning, markups, and review comment creations. The plan comparison tool allows for comparison of revised plans and other plans in the system through an overlay tool that identifies changes with color.

After all reviews are complete, the Agency returns a marked plan set to the submitter along with a comment or approval letter. This collaborative process can go back and forth as many times as necessary until plans and documents have been mutually agreed upon. The ePlan solution tracks each review cycle and metrics are available across projects and reviewers.

When the review process is complete, the system creates an approved plan set, complete with required stamps or signatures, and generates an approval letter. The submitter is notified that their plans have been approved and the project is closed within the ePlan solution.

eSignature Software

In addition to the ePlan system, Ohio EPA has improved workflow in many areas of the Agency by using electronic signature software for a variety of documents such as loan agreements, grant contracts, contract change orders, and employment forms. While working remotely, Ohio EPA staff have completed more than 500 eSignature transactions. The software has provided significant time savings and has allowed staff to stay healthy by minimizing contact with other individuals or with paper files.

Virtual Site Inspections

Part of Ohio EPA's core mission is to ensure compliance with environmental laws and regulations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agency has continued its work in the field to ensure that we are responding to spills, releases, and other environmental incidents that could significantly impact public health or the environment. In addition, we continue to ensure the important work is being done to monitor the quality of our air and water.

As indicated in the previous sections, we have been effectively working with virtual tools and technology over the past several months and have been able to maintain a high degree of functionality as an organization, including processing permits and authorizations and otherwise serving our external customers.

As we optimize our use of various technology tools, the Agency is now exploring opportunities to use these tools in the field through virtual site visits. In the near term, our ability to expand our field presence with these tools will allow us to continue collecting important information from our regulated entities while also protecting against the potential spread of COVID-19.

In the longer-term, adding the use of virtual tools to the Agency's compliance toolkit, both from a compliance inspection and assistance standpoint, can help us reach even more facilities because of the efficiencies gained in reducing travel time, etc.

The use of virtual tools is not a substitute for the important in-person interactions needed during inspections and other field work and for effective engagement and outreach. However, the Agency is optimistic about the potential to expand the use of these tools where they can be effective.
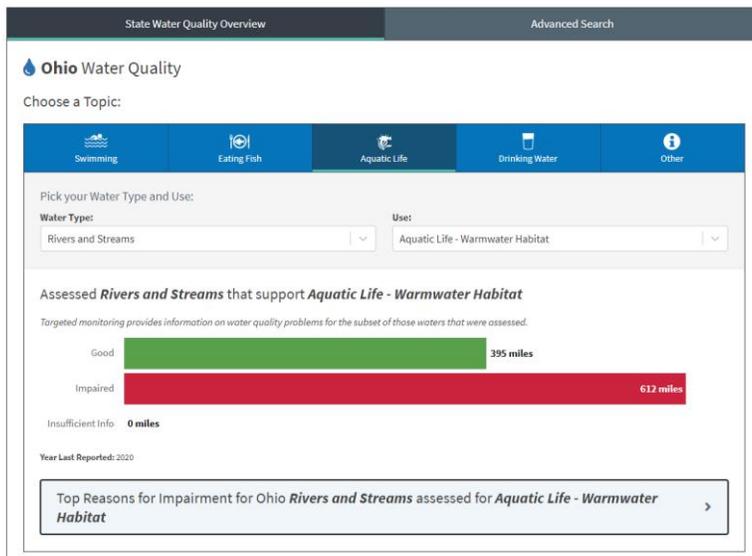
We will be reaching out to our regulated entities to review our virtual site visit protocols with them as part of our inspection process. The Agency has begun using virtual site visits for select categories of inspections (routine, single program, initial screening, non-enforcement related) and will be gathering information to help assess the effectiveness and improve the process.

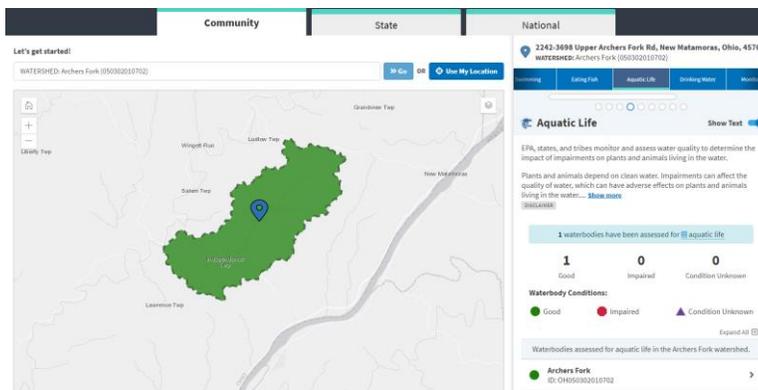## Ohio EPA's 2020 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report

Every two years, Ohio EPA prepares an Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report (Integrated Report) for approval by U.S. EPA. The Integrated Report (IR) indicates the general condition of Ohio's waters and identifies waters that are not meeting water quality goals. The IR can be used for numerous purposes, including development of permitting conditions and planning of surface water restoration activities. The report satisfies the Clean Water Act requirements for both Section 305(b) for biennial reports on the condition of the State's waters and Section 303(d) for a prioritized list of impaired waters.

Example Statewide Look at the Aquatic Life Use Status of Warmwater Habitat Large River Segments

The 2020 IR marks the transition of Ohio EPA's report into U.S. EPA's federal database - Assessment, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Tracking and Implementation System (ATTAINS). Once entered into the system, the data is available online through U.S. EPA's *How's My Waterway* app. In addition to data from ATTAINS, this easily accessible app pulls information from U.S. EPA's other databases, allowing users to query data in a straight-forward manner.

Example Look at a Selected Watershed Assessment Unit

The How's My Waterway app helps increase awareness of water quality throughout the state or in a specific watershed. Ohio EPA plans to provide additional water quality data through U.S. EPA's tools to make them even more useful to stakeholders.
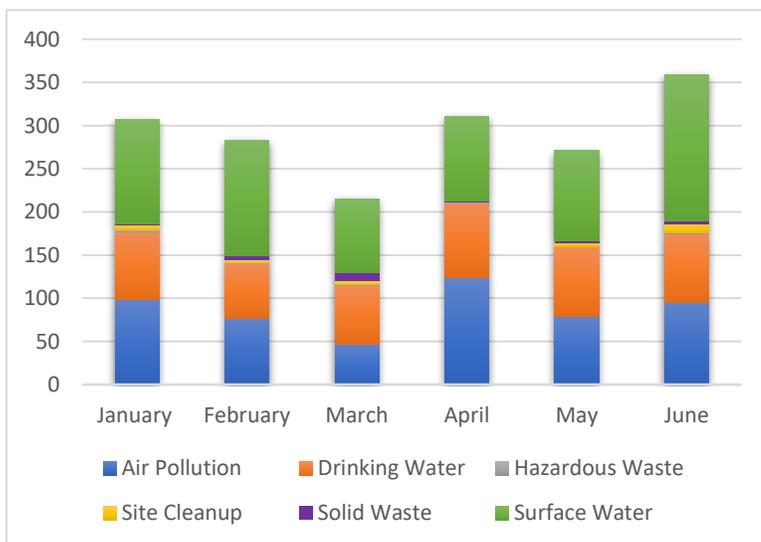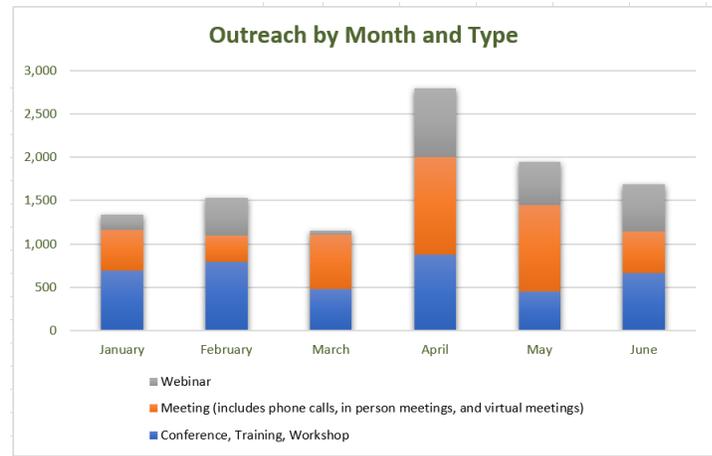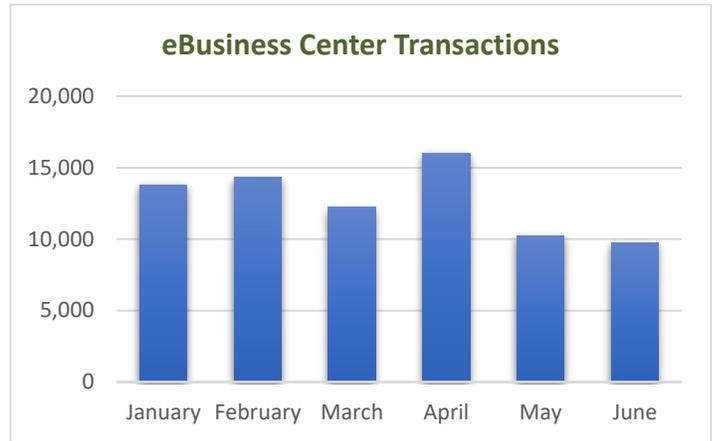
Customer Outreach, Assistance, and Interactions

Ohio EPA's eBusiness Center is a secure portal for regulated entities to electronically complete and file Ohio EPA-related reports and permit applications.

In addition to these business transactions, Ohio EPA also interacts with the regulated community, public and other stakeholders daily through on-site visits, email, newsletters, and webinars.

To ensure that we continued to share information with the public and meet legal requirements for public hearings, Ohio EPA began holding public meeting on permits and rules in March 2020. During the virtual hearings, the public can view and hear information about the topic and submit written comments that are read into the record by the hearing host. The virtual hearings are accessed through Ohio EPA's website at *epa.ohio.gov/virtual*.

As you can see in the chart to the right, in addition to the required public meetings, we have continued to make use of virtual tools to conduct business through online meetings, phone calls, and webinars. Another significant source of outreach is our electronic newsletters and listserv notices that are targeted to users who have signed up to receive information about topics of interest.

eBusiness Center Transactions

Outreach by Month and Type

- Webinar
- Meeting (includes phone calls, in person meetings, and virtual meetings)
- Conference, Training, Workshop

Air Pollution | Drinking Water | Hazardous Waste
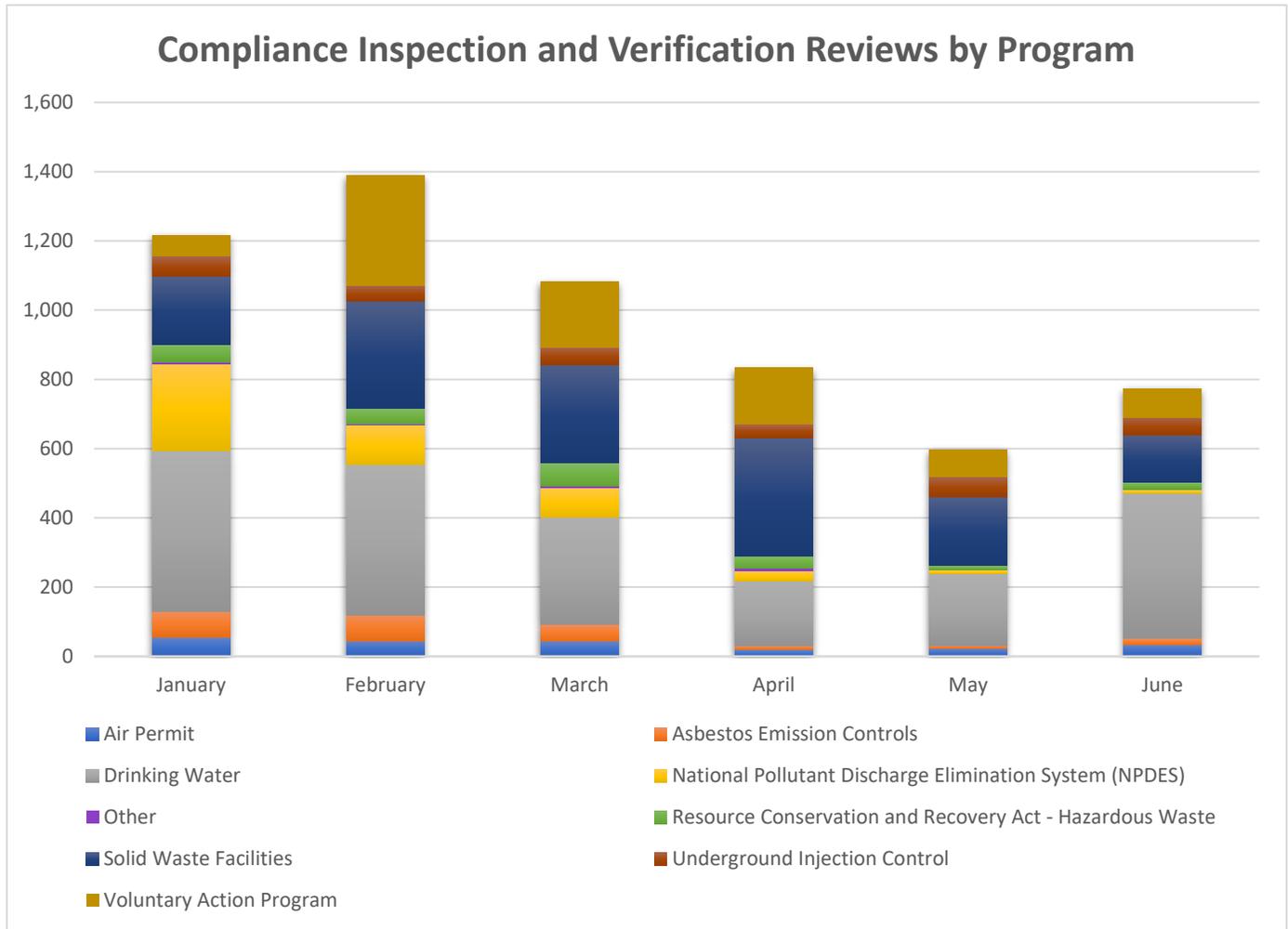Site Cleanup | Solid Waste | Surface Water

Agency Permits and Authorizing Actions

This dashboard displays permits and other authorizing actions, which include plan approvals and permits-to-install, issued from Jan. 1 – June 30, 2020 for key program areas, including surface water, air pollution, and drinking water.

Compliance Inspections and Verification Reviews

This dashboard reflects the Agency's efforts to verify or inspect for compliance with permits, environmental rules and other requirements. These are broken down by quarter and Agency program. An inspection is defined as Agency personnel conducting a field visit to a site or facility. Verification review includes review of submittals that are required by the regulations, such as compliance reports, monitoring data, etc. The large numbers in the drinking water program reflect the Agency's work in reviewing monitoring and analytical reports that are submitted by thousands of public water systems each month.

Compliance Inspection and Verification Reviews by Program

Legend:
- Air Permit
- Asbestos Emission Controls
- Drinking Water
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)
- Other
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act - Hazardous Waste
- Solid Waste Facilities
- Underground Injection Control
- Voluntary Action Program

Funding for Environmental Protection and Cleanup

Award Amount
- $0-$250K
- $250K-$500K
- $500K-$1M
- $1M-$5M
- $5M-$20M
- More than $20M

Largest Program Year for Drinking Water Supply and Improvements

Ohio EPA's Water Supply Revolving Loan Account (WSRLA) provides financial assistance to communities for planning, design, construction, and improvements to public water systems.

The WSRLA had a record program year 2020 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020) where Ohio EPA awarded WSRLA loans totaling close to $225 million to help communities address drinking water infrastructure needs. Small, disadvantaged communities received about $14 million in principal forgiveness funding. $96,000 in grants for emergency generators were supplied to water systems to enable continued operation of facilities during power outages. The map here shows funding amounts provided through the WSRLA and companion Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) program which addresses wastewater needs.

Grant Funding

Ohio EPA provides grant funding for various programs to clean and protect our land, air and water resources and promote environmentally sustainable practices.

Program	Funding
Water Pollution Control Loan Fund Principal Forgiveness	$15.5M
Water Supply Revolving Loan Account Principal Forgiveness	$8.1M
Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program	$7.4M
Scrap Tire Recycling and Cleanup	$0.37M
Mosquito Control Grants	$0.80M
Grand Total	**$32.2M**

State Revolving Loan Fund Awards

Ohio EPA's state revolving funds, the Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) and the Water Supply Revolving Loan Account (WSRLA), provide below market rate loan financing for public wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects. Since these programs started, more than $10 billion in financing has been provided to Ohio communities for a wide variety of wastewater and water infrastructure projects across the state. This financing has helped improve water quality in Ohio while providing substantial savings to Ohio communities when compared to market rate loan financing.

Month	Water Pollution Control Loan Fund	Water Supply Revolving Loan Account
January	$121.9M	
February	$28M	$18.3M
March	$99.7M	$38.5M
April	$25.3M	$3M
May	$8M	$76.7M
June	$13.3M	$27.9M
Grand Total	**$296.2M**	**$164.4M**

Emergency Response

Ohio EPA's Office of Emergency Response (ER) includes staff stationed throughout Ohio who coordinate with local, state, and federal first responders and support entities on environmental emergencies. Typical environmental response incidents include train wrecks, facility malfunctions, highway crashes, fish kills, chemical releases, and natural disasters. Our team works in partnership with others to minimize and abate the impact these releases cause to the public and the environment.

Our ER teams respond 24-hours a day, seven days a week to incidents across the state. Statewide, Ohio EPA records more than 5,000 incident reports annually through calls to our emergency response spill hotline from citizens, companies, law enforcement, emergency responders, and other agencies.