

SPEED Program & DEP Permitting Improvements

Position Paper | Commercial Real Estate Development Association
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Our Position

CREDA Pittsburgh supports the SPEED program and recognizes it as a genuine step forward in Pennsylvania's permitting culture. The numbers show real progress, and our members have noticed. The purpose of this paper is to offer the specific, on-the-ground feedback of the commercial real estate development community to help DEP and the General Assembly build on early momentum, close remaining gaps, and extend the program's reach to the full scope of permits that affect commercial real estate projects across Western Pennsylvania.

180 days

PA recommended NPDES NOI timeline before breaking ground

21 days

Ohio NOI submission requirement before breaking ground

Source: Joint CREDA Pittsburgh and Allegheny Conference member survey; Ohio EPA NPDES General Permit requirements.

Member Survey Findings

The joint CREDA Pittsburgh and Allegheny Conference survey asked commercial real estate developers and project applicants about their direct experience with the NPDES permitting process. Respondents were asked to identify the changes that would most improve the process. Their responses, ranked by frequency:

- Reduce the documentation burden. The paperwork and documentation requirements for NPDES permits, particularly PAG-01 for smaller projects, are disproportionate to the scope of work. Simplifying the application package is the single most frequently cited improvement. PAG-01 in particular has accumulated documentation requirements that rival the full Individual NPDES permit and should be fundamentally reformed for small-scale construction and single-family residential projects.
- DEP should manage required documentation check websites internally. PNDI and other required documentation check sites are administered by third-party external platforms, which creates confusion, inconsistency, and processing delays at the front end of every application. DEP should bring these tools in-house.
- Mandate reviewer responsiveness with a defined deadline. Reviewers at both the County Conservation District and DEP levels should be required to acknowledge submissions and respond to applicant inquiries within one week.
- Improve internal DEP coordination between program areas. Applicants routinely receive comments that require contact with other DEP divisions, only to find that the reviewing staff cannot facilitate that connection internally.

Additional Recommendations

- Expand SPEED to cover General NPDES Permits (PAG-02). The current program covers Individual NPDES permits. General Permits represent the largest volume of applications from commercial real estate developers in Western Pennsylvania. Expanding SPEED eligibility to PAG-02 applications would benefit the widest range of active projects.
- Mandate the single-comment-round rule for all permits, not only SPEED permits. DEP should adopt a binding policy requiring all substantive comments to be delivered in the initial review letter, applicable to every permit type regardless of whether the project is in SPEED.
- Extend SPEED to Chapter 105 Water Obstruction and Encroachment permits more broadly. Chapter 105 permits are frequently the critical path item for projects involving waterway crossings, floodplain development, and wetland impacts.
- Require statewide uniformity in Conservation District procedures. A developer with projects in multiple counties encounters a materially different regulatory environment in each one. DEP should issue binding statewide implementation standards that Conservation Districts must follow.