



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Environmental Quality

Agency Headquarters

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October 6, 2026

Sent via electronic mail to: Governor.Kotek@oregon.gov

The Honorable Tina Kotek
Governor of Oregon
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: DEQ Permitting Process Improvements

Dear Governor Kotek,

I am writing to share that DEQ is launching a concerted statewide Air Quality Permitting Process Improvement effort to address staff feedback, concerns from industry and legislators, and persistent backlogs. This effort closely aligns with your priority in HB 4084 (2026), related reforms focused on improving accountability in Oregon's permitting systems, and discussions with your office.

The initiative will focus on developing a consistent, transparent, and accountable statewide approach to processing air quality permits in a timely manner to meet the needs of both DEQ staff and the regulated community. Our goal is to create a modernized permit development process that is clear, accessible, predictable and efficient while maintaining Oregon's strong environmental protection standards.

First, we are establishing a comprehensive and integrated team comprised of staff with policy and implementation expertise, led by a special advisor who will report directly to me. The team will build on our ongoing efforts to improve permit development, strengthen relationships with permittees, and create tools, training, and guidance to support permit writers and applicants. The special advisor will guide permitting reforms by coordinating across our Headquarters and Regional offices to support and implement necessary process improvements.

DEQ is also hosting a series of listening sessions with the regulated community and interested parties this month. Permittees provide information DEQ needs to issue efficient, accurate permits. Their knowledge and active participation in our efforts to improve the processes and tools the Agency uses to gather this information is critical to the effectiveness of our permitting systems.

Lastly, but also of critical importance, the agency is in the process of contracting a third party to conduct an independent review of the air quality permitting program to identify systemic issues, determine a benchmark against other states, and recommend long-term structural improvements. An independent, objective review is essential for providing confidence to all interested parties that the agency has thoroughly identified the most significant areas needing improvement for Oregon. A

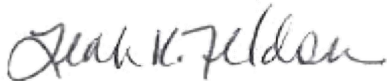
Request for Proposals is under final review and expected to go out this month with a goal of having a contractor selected and beginning program review efforts by early January.

The combination of dedicated leadership attention, robust external engagement, and independent third-party evaluation has proven successful in other DEQ program improvement efforts. In particular, the restructuring of the water quality permitting program has significantly reduced the backlog of Clean Water Act National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. I am confident that applying a similar approach to air quality will strengthen engagement among staff and permittees, create productive opportunities for feedback, and establish clear expectations for complete applications and timely permit decisions.

Importantly, these efforts will be supported by transparent metrics and documented processes so that DEQ and the regulated community can clearly measure progress and understand expectations.

This effort responds to calls for permitting reform while maintaining Oregon's commitment to environmental protection and economic growth. I look forward to keeping you apprised of our progress as we move this work forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Leah K. Feldon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Leah" being more prominent.

Leah Feldon
Director

Cc: Geoff Huntington, Sr. Natural Resources Policy Advisor (Geoff.huntington@oregon.gov)