



# Water Quality Control Division

## Vault Dewatering Guidance - August 2014

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### A. Introduction

The dewatering of water from a vault results in a point source discharge that may be subject to requirements to apply for a discharge permit in accordance with the federal Clean Water Act and the Colorado Water Quality Control Act. This guidance identifies options for meeting requirements for these discharges. This document contains guidance only, and does not impose any new requirements or revise any current Water Quality Control Division policies or procedures.

This discharge guidance document has been developed by the Water Quality Control Division to provide information regarding the applicability of the Colorado Discharge Permit System (CDPS) permits to discharges from vault dewatering. Vault dewatering discharges are expected to be short-term or intermittent and are typically conducted to remove stormwater and/or groundwater from partially or fully enclosed vault structures.

For the purpose of this guidance, vaults are subsurface structures that provide access to contained utility equipment such as potable water pipes, gas and steam pipes, electric lines, or signal transmission lines. They may also include structures that housed equipment such as an underground



storage tank. Vaults do not include underground structures that convey materials without additional containment such as junction boxes, accesses, or inlets for sanitary and storm sewers. Discharges include all releases of water to storm sewers, state waters (including streams, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, etc.), or to the ground. Part E of this document provides additional guidance on options for disposal without a discharge.

Please contact the division for additional guidance if the permitting requirements for a specific vault or category of water are not clear.

## **B. Vaults containing stormwater runoff only**

Stormwater runoff results from precipitation or snow melt. Stormwater runoff that flows into a vault or that infiltrates into a vault at a subsurface elevation above the groundwater table and is then dewatered is addressed in this section.

Discharges to a municipal separate storm sewer (MS4) may be subject to MS4 permit requirements. All discharges must comply with the lawful requirements of federal agencies municipalities, counties, drainage districts and other local agencies regarding any discharges to storm drain systems, conveyances, or other water courses under their jurisdiction. Contact the municipality for additional information.

### *1. Contaminated stormwater discharge from vaults*

Vault dewatering discharges of stormwater that is contaminated by pollutant sources associated with the vault requires a permit to discharge to state waters or to land.

Stormwater is considered contaminated by pollutant sources associated with the vault if it contains process materials or pollutants unique to the vault (including pollutants that may have leaked from pipes, pumps, or equipment in the vault). For the purpose of this guidance, stormwater is not considered contaminated by pollutant sources associated with the vault if the only pollutants present are pollutants mobilized by runoff from a storm event prior to flowing into the vault. Examples of these pollutants include oil deposited by vehicles in a parking lot, fertilizers applied to surrounding landscapes, or deicing agents applied to the roads and impervious surfaces.

Permit coverage may be obtained for discharges of contaminated stormwater from a vault under one of the general permits for Remediation Activities Discharging to Surface Water (COG315000) or to Groundwater (COG316000). Refer to the applications for these permits for additional guidance, or to Part E for discussion on alternative disposal options.

### *2. Stormwater discharges that are not contaminated from vaults*

If the stormwater contained within the vault is not considered contaminated by pollutant sources associated with the vault, as discussed in part B.1, above, it may be discharged as follows:

#### *a. Discharges to land*

Unless specifically designated by the division, discharges of stormwater to land that are not contaminated do not require a discharge permit. This assumes that there is absolutely no runoff or discharge to a state surface water (including stream, wetlands, lakes, etc.), storm sewers, or conveyances to surface water or storm sewers.

#### *b. Discharges to a state surface water, storm sewers, and conveyances*

Where the source water for the dewatering is composed entirely of stormwater runoff, the requirement to obtain permit coverage for a discharged to state surface waters (including streams, wetlands, lakes, etc.), storm sewers, or conveyances to surface water

or storm sewers is contained in part 5 CCR 61.32 of the Colorado Discharge Permit System Regulations. Part 5 CCR 61.32 defines discharges of stormwater runoff that are associated with industrial sources, including construction, that are required to apply for authorization under a discharge permit. Refer to the division's Construction Stormwater Fact Sheet and CDPS Discharge Permitting Requirements for Stormwater Discharges Guidance for information on stormwater runoff requiring an application for a discharge permit in accordance with 5 CCR 61.3(2).

If an industrial or construction stormwater discharge permit authorization is already held by the facility where dewatering of the stormwater is conducted, the dewatering discharge must be consistent with the effluent limitations, terms, and condition of that stormwater permit.

Where the source water for the dewatering discharge is composed entirely of stormwater runoff that does not meet the requirement for industrial and construction stormwater runoff permitting in 5 CCR 61.3(2) and is not contaminated as discussed in Part B.1, a discharge permit is not required unless specifically designated by the division.

### **C. Vaults containing groundwater or groundwater mixed with stormwater**

Groundwater is water that is not visible on the surface of the ground under natural conditions. It is the division's current practice to determine that a dewatering discharge contains groundwater when the discharge may include infiltration into a vault from an elevation below the groundwater table.

#### *1. Discharges to surface water, storm sewers, and conveyance*

The discharge of water contained in vaults that includes groundwater requires permit coverage, which must be obtained prior to discharge to a state surface water (including stream, wetlands, lakes, etc.), storm sewers, or conveyances to surface water or storm sewers.

#### *2. Discharges to land*

The discharge of water contained in vaults that includes uncontaminated groundwater does not require permit coverage as long as the requirements in the division's Low Risk Guidance for Discharge of Uncontaminated Groundwater to Land can be met. Where the discharge of groundwater does not meet the criteria outlined in the low risk guidance, including but not limited to groundwater containing pollutants in exceedance of water quality standards, permit coverage is required.

In this case, the discharge may be covered by the following permit options:

- Subterranean Dewatering or Well Development (COG603000)
- Construction Dewatering General Permit (COG070000)
- Remediation Activities Discharging to Surface Water (COG315000)
- Remediation Activities Discharging to Groundwater (COG316000)

Refer to Part F for references and guidance documents pertaining to application and coverage of these permits.

### **D. Vaults containing water or waste other than groundwater or stormwater runoff**

If the water present within a vault is not 100% groundwater and/or stormwater runoff, permit coverage is likely required to discharge to state waters or to land. Examples include process waste

waters, sanitary sewage, or spilled materials that have flowed into the vault. Permit coverage for discharges of contaminated stormwater from a vault may be possible under the following permits:

- Remediation Activities Discharging to Surface Water (COG315000)
- Remediation Activities Discharging to Groundwater (COG316000)

Refer to Part F for references and guidance documents pertaining to application and coverage of these permits.

## E. Alternative Disposal Methods

The above guidance addresses discharges of water regulated under the Colorado Water Quality Control Act. This includes discharges directly, or via a conveyance, to any state surface or groundwater and to land. Potential alternative disposal options include:

### 1. *Evapotranspiration*

If the water is 100% evaporated or evapotranspired and therefore does not soak into the ground, it is not considered a discharge and is not required to obtain permit coverage. This may include discharges onto an impervious surface that is contained to facilitate evaporation or discharges to a vegetated area at a rate that facilitates evapotranspiration. Vault water that is sent to an impoundment or beneficially reused through land application may be subject to the requirements administered by the Colorado Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Division.

### 2. *Discharges to a sanitary sewer system*

Water may be disposed of into a sanitary sewer system with permission from the waste water treatment facility. Contact the water treatment system for additional information.

### 3. *Commercial disposal services*

Commercial operators may be able to accept the waste for disposal.

## F. Additional Information

Division documents referenced in this guidance are listed below. They can be found on the division's website at [www.coloradowaterpermits.com](http://www.coloradowaterpermits.com).

- CDPS Discharge Permitting Requirements for Stormwater Discharges Guidance
  - Commerce and Industry > Compliance Assistance and Guidance
- Construction Stormwater Fact Sheet
  - Construction > Compliance Assistance and Guidance
- Subterranean Dewatering or Well Development General Permit (COG603000)
  - Commerce and Industry > General Permits
- Construction Dewatering General Permit (COG070000)
  - Construction > General Permits
- Remediation Activities Discharging General Permits (COG315000 /COG316000)
  - Construction or Commerce and Industry > General Permits
- Construction Dewatering and Remediation Activities Discharging Application Guidance
  - Construction or Commerce and Industry > General Permits