



Triennial Review

The Clean Water Act (CWA) requires that states adopt the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recommended criteria, or develop their own, and routinely review and update water quality standards to ensure consistency with the requirements of the Act. Specifically, §303(c)(1) states the "...State shall from time to time (but at least once each three year period...) hold public hearings for the purpose of reviewing applicable water quality standards and, as appropriate, modifying and adopting standards." This public review period is referred to as the "triennial review."

In addition to requiring states to open the book to the public for their comments on state water quality standards, the CWA requires states to respond to EPA guidance on new toxic criteria as well. "Whenever a State reviews water quality standards... or revises or adopts new standards..., such State shall adopt criteria for all toxic pollutants listed pursuant to §307(a)(1) of this title for which criteria have been published under Section 304(a) of this title, the discharge or presence of which in the affected waters could reasonably be expected to interfere with those designated uses adopted by the State, as necessary to support such designated uses." [§303(c)(2)(B)]

States are also required to identify those water bodies that are not designated or protected for fishable/swimmable uses and to determine if any new information has become available that will allow the attainment of these uses. If the state determines that the fishable/swimmable uses are, in fact, attainable in those water bodies, the water quality standards are to be revised accordingly. Similarly, the state should work to designate uses to water bodies that have not yet been designated in the water quality standards.