



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Antidegradation Policy

FROM: Patrick Tobin, Director *Patrick Tobin*
Criteria & Standards Division (WH-585)

TO: Water Management Division Directors
Regions I-X

As a direct result of public and Congressional interest much more activity is focusing on the antidegradation policy component of the water quality standards program than has been the case in previous years. Every indication is that this high level of interest will continue. During the latest Congressional debates on the Clean Water Act, "antibacksliding" is a dominant issue and the Office of Water has been quizzed repeatedly on its commitment to executing a strong antidegradation policy, a commitment the Office of Water has affirmed.

There are two actions each region should have underway concerning the antidegradation policy. First, for those States whose existing policies do not meet all the requirements listed in Section 131.12 of the water quality standards regulation action should be underway to bring the State policies into compliance with Federal requirements. As evidenced by Regional/Headquarters review comments on State standards in the past year or two there are quite a few States whose antidegradation policies need improvement. Second, a method, plan, or procedure for consistently implementing that policy needs to be developed if one does not currently exist. These methods could be either State-specific or region-wide.

Neither the policy nor these specific requirements are new - as a matter of fact the policy is over 17 years old. However, with water quality improving, technology-based limits being established and met, the importance and implementation impacts of the antidegradation policy likely will increase. We need to be prepared to implement this policy fully and in a consistent manner.

With your considerable assistance, more definitive guidance on interpreting and applying the policy was issued this year. We are continuing to work on the issues concerning the implementation of nonpoint source control programs and antidegradation. If changes to the Clean Water Act impact antidegradation we will inform you immediately.

We will assist you as much as possible as as you and the States move to implement the policy within the policy guidelines established.

cc: Regional WQS Coordinators