

SOP 2: WET WEATHER OUTFALL INSPECTION

Introduction

Outfalls from an engineered storm drain system can be in the form of pipes or ditches. Under current and pending regulations, it is important to inspect and document water quality from these outfalls under both dry weather and wet weather conditions. SOP 1, “Dry Weather Outfall Inspection”, covers the objectives of that type of inspection. This SOP discusses wet weather inspection objectives and how they differ from dry weather inspection objectives. The primary difference is that wet weather inspection aims to describe and evaluate the first flush of stormwater discharged from an outfall during a storm, representing the maximum pollutant load managed by receiving water.

Definition of Wet Weather

A storm is considered a representative wet weather event if greater than 0.1 inch of rain falls and occurs at least 72 hours after the previously measurable (greater than 0.1 inch of rainfall) storm event. In some watersheds, based on the amount of impervious surface present, increased discharge from an outfall may not result from 0.1 inch of rain. An understanding of how outfalls respond to different events will develop as the inspection process proceeds over several months, allowing the inspectors to refine an approach for inspections.

Ideally, the evaluation and any samples collected should occur within the first 30 minutes of discharge to reflect the first flush or maximum pollutant load.

Typical practice is to prepare for a wet weather inspection event when weather forecasts show a 40% chance of rain or greater. If the inspector intends to collect analytical samples, coordination with the laboratory for bottleware and for sample drop-off needs to occur in advance.

Visual Condition Assessment

The attached Wet Weather Outfall Inspection Survey should be used to document observations related to the quality of stormwater conveyed by the structure. Observations such as the following can indicate sources of pollution within the storm drain system:

- Oil sheen
- Discoloration
- Trash and debris

For any visual observation of pollution in a stormwater outfall discharge, an investigation into the pollution source should occur, but the following are often true:

1. Foam: indicator of upstream vehicle washing activities, or an illicit discharge.
2. Oil sheen: result of a leak or spill.

3. Cloudiness: indicator of suspended solids such as dust, ash, powdered chemicals and ground up materials.
4. Color or odor: Indicator of raw materials, chemicals, or sewage.
5. Excessive sediment: indicator or disturbed earth of other unpaved areas lacking adequate erosion control measures.
6. Sanitary waste and optical enhancers (fluorescent dyes added to laundry detergent): indicators of illicit discharge.
7. Orange staining: indicator of high mineral concentrations.

Many of these observations are indicators of an illicit discharge. Examples of illicit discharges include: cross-connections of sewer services to engineered storm drain systems; leaking septic systems; intentional discharge of pollutants to catch basins; combined sewer overflows; connected floor drains; and sump pumps connected to the system (under some circumstances). Additional guidelines for illicit discharge investigations are included in SOP 10, "Locating Illicit Discharges".

Although many of the observations are indicators of illicit discharge it should be noted that several of these indicators may also occur naturally. Orange staining may be the result of naturally occurring iron, and thus unrelated to pollution. Foam can be formed when the physical characteristics of water are altered by the presence of organic materials. Foam is typically found in waters with high organic content such as bog lakes, streams that originate from bog lakes, productive lakes, wetlands, or woody areas. To determine the difference between natural foam and foam cause by pollution, consider the following:

1. Wind direction or turbulence: natural foam occurrences on the beach coincide with onshore winds. Often, foam can be found along a shoreline and/or on open waters during windy days. Natural occurrences in rivers can be found downstream of a turbulent site.
2. Proximity to a potential pollution source: some entities including the textile industry, paper production facilities, oil industries, and fire fighting activities work with materials that cause foaming in water. If these materials are released to a water body in large quantities, they can cause foaming. Also, the presence of silt in water, such as from a construction site can cause foam.
3. Feeling: natural foam is typically persistent, light, not slimy to the touch.
4. Presence of decomposing plants or organic material in the water.

Both bacteria and petroleum can create a sheen on the water surface. The source of the sheen can be differentiated by disturbing it, such as with a pole. A sheen caused by oil will remain intact and move in a swirl pattern; a sheen caused by bacteria will separate and appear "blocky". Bacterial or naturally occurring sheens are usually silver or relatively dull in color and will break up into a number of small patches of sheen. The cause may be presence of iron, decomposition of organic material or presence of certain bacteria. Bacterial sheen is not a pollutant but should be noted.

Optical enhancers, fluorescent dyes added to laundry detergent, are typically detected through the use of clean, white cotton pads placed within the discharge for several days, dried then viewed under a UV light. If the cotton pad displays fluorescent patches, optical enhancers are present. Optical enhancers are occasionally visible as a bluish-purple haze on the water surface; however the testing method should be used to confirm the presence of optical enhancers.

The Wet Weather Outfall Inspection Survey includes fields where these and other specific observations can be noted. The inspector shall indicate the presence of a specific water quality indicator or parameter by marking “Yes”. If “Yes” is marked, provide additional details in the comments section. If the indicator in question is not present mark “No”.

Within the comments section, provide additional information with regard to recorded precipitation totals, or more detailed descriptions of observations made during the inspection and corrective actions taken.

Measuring Water Quality

Based on the results of the Visual Condition Assessment, it may be necessary to collect additional data about water quality. Water quality samples can be in the form of screening using field test kits or by discrete analytical samples processed by a laboratory.

Information on how to use field test kits is included in SOP 13, “Water Quality Screening with Field Test Kits”, and the Wet Weather Outfall Inspection Survey includes fields to document the results of such screening. The Inspection Survey also provides values for what can be considered an appropriate benchmark for a variety of parameters that can be evaluated with field test kits.

If the results of screening using field test kits indicate that the outfall’s water quality exceeds the benchmarks provided, collection of discrete analytical samples should be considered.

Analytical Sample Collection

Sample collection methods may vary based on specific outfall limitations but shall follow test procedures outlined in 40 CFR 136. A discrete manual or grab sample can classify water at a distinct point in time. These samples are easily collected and used primarily when the water quality of the discharge is expected to be homogeneous, or unchanging, in nature. A flow-weighted composite sample will classify water quality over a measured period of time. These samples are used when the water quality of the discharge is expected to be heterogeneous, or fluctuating, in nature. Grab samples are more common for wet weather outfall inspections due to the time-sensitive nature of the process.

Protocols for collecting a grab sample shall include the following:

1. Do not eat, drink or smoke during sample collection and processing.
2. Do not collect or process samples near a running vehicle.
3. Do not park vehicles in the immediate sample collection area, including both running and non-running vehicles.
4. Always wear clean, powder-free nitrile gloves when handling sample containers and lids.
5. Never touch the inside surface of a sample container or lid, even with gloved hands.
6. Never allow the inner surface of a sample container or lid to be contacted by any material other than the sample water.
7. Collect samples while facing upstream and so as not to disturb water or sediments in the outfall pipe or ditch.

8. Do not overfill sample containers, and do not dump out any liquid in them. Liquids are often added to sample containers intentionally by the analytical laboratory as a preservative or for pH adjustment.
9. Slowly lower the bottle into the water to avoid bottom disturbance and stirring up sediment.
10. Do not allow any object or material to fall into or contact the collected water sample.
11. Do not allow rainwater to drip from rain gear or other surfaces into sample containers.
12. Replace and tighten sample container lids immediately after sample collection.
13. Accurately label the sample with the time and location.
14. Document on the Wet Weather Outfall Inspection Survey that analytical samples were collected, specify parameters, and note the sample time on the Inspection Survey. This creates a reference point for samples.

Analytical Sample Quality Control and Assurance

Upon completion of successful sample collection, the samples must be sent or delivered to a MassDEP-approved laboratory for analytical testing. Quality control and assurance are important to ensuring accurate analytical test results.

Sample preservation is required to prevent contaminant degradation between sampling and analysis and should be completed in accordance with 40 CFR 136.3.

Maximum acceptable holding times are also specified for each analytical method in 40 CFR 136.3. Holding time is defined as the period of time between sample collection and extraction for analysis of the sample at the laboratory. Holding time is important because prompt laboratory analysis allows the laboratory to review the data and if analytical problems are found, re-analyze the affected samples within the holding times.

Chain of custody forms are designed to provide sample submittal information and document transfers of sample custody. The forms are typically provided by the laboratory and must be completed by the field sampling personnel for each sample submitted to the lab for analysis. The document must be signed by both the person releasing the sample and the person receiving the sample every time the sample changes hands. The sampling personnel shall keep one copy of the form and send the remaining copies to the laboratory with the samples. Custody seals, which are dated, signed and affixed to the sample container, may be used if the samples are shipped in a cooler via courier or commercial overnight shipping.

Attachments

1. Wet Weather Outfall Inspection Survey

Related Standard Operating Procedures

1. SOP 1, Dry Weather Outfall Inspection
2. SOP 10, Locating Illicit Discharges
3. SOP 13, Water Quality Screening in the Field