

Virginia Citizen Monitoring Program

Virginia's Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program, or "citizen monitoring," uses volunteers to collect data. Citizen monitoring programs are often run by local governments, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, citizen organizations, community groups and colleges. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) began partnering with citizen monitoring organizations in 1998. DEQ and its partners recognize that a robust citizen monitoring program has many advantages, which include:

- Supplementing DEQ's monitoring network to improve monitoring efficiency and effectiveness
- Alerting the agency to potential pollution issues
- Providing baseline data to establish background conditions and prioritize monitoring needs
- Documenting water quality improvement projects
- Serving as an important resource for fostering stewardship, and water quality education and outreach.



How does DEQ use citizen monitoring data?

DEQ reviews and classifies citizen monitoring data into three levels based on quality assurance. **Level 1** data have no quality assurance or water quality standard for the measured parameter, and are used for educational purposes or to identify potential water quality concerns. **Level 2** data have some quality assurance and methods similar to DEQ, and can be used to prioritize areas for DEQ follow-up sampling or to track improvements in water quality following implementation activities. **Level 3** data follow sampling and analyses protocols recognized by DEQ, and can be used for water quality assessments in accordance with DEQ's [Water Quality Assessment Guidance Manual](#).¹

In accordance with Virginia law, citizen monitoring data cannot be used in any enforcement action. Citizen monitoring data are not considered valid for ambient water quality assessment if they were collected in a permitted mixing zone or at discharge pipes. For more information, visit [DEQ's Citizen Monitoring Guidance website](#).²

What is a mixing zone?

A mixing zone is an area where wastewater discharged from a permitted facility enters and mixes with a water body.

More information on mixing zones is available via the Virginia Administrative Code, 9VAC25-260-20.B, or at the following website:

<http://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title9/agency25/chapter260/section20/>

¹ <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WaterQualityInformationTMDLs/WaterQualityAssessments/2016WQAGuidanceManual.aspx>

² <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WaterQualityInformationTMDLs/WaterQualityMonitoring/CitizenMonitoring.aspx>

If citizen monitoring data indicate a potential issue, how does DEQ respond?

DEQ's response to citizen monitoring data depends on the category into which the data fall. For example, Level 3 data may be used in the agency's Water Quality Assessment process to list or delist waters from the 303(d) "impaired waters" list. Level 2 data indicating potential water quality issues may be used to list waters as having an "observed effect." These waters are prioritized by the agency for follow-up monitoring through the agency's ambient monitoring network and based on available resources.

Citizen data that suggest a potential issue with a permitted facility may be prioritized for follow-up monitoring via the agency's facility inspection monitoring program. Funding for this program is very limited and is typically used for discharge point monitoring to check on compliance of existing facilities. Occasionally this monitoring may be conducted in-stream near an existing facility.

How can citizens nominate state surface waters for DEQ monitoring?

Each January, DEQ's Water Monitoring and Assessment Program issues a public notice to solicit input from citizens on the agency's Annual Monitoring Plan. Requests for monitoring are accommodated as resources allow and provided the requested location fits within the agency's ambient monitoring program. For more information, visit [DEQ's Follow-up Monitoring website](#).³

For more information on Virginia's Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program, or to find out how you can get involved with citizen monitoring, please contact DEQ's Water Quality Data Liaison, Stuart Torbeck, at 804-698-4461, or Charles.Torbeck@deq.virginia.gov, or DEQ's QA Officer, James Beckley, at 804-698-4025 or James.Beckley@deq.virginia.gov. You may also visit [DEQ's Citizen Water Quality Monitoring](#)⁴ website.



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<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WaterQualityInformationTMDLs/WaterQualityMonitoring/CitizenMonitoring/FollowupMonitoring.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WaterQualityInformationTMDLs/WaterQualityMonitoring/CitizenMonitoring.aspx>