

Introduction and Overview



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Chapter 1: *Introduction and Overview*

Addressing Requirements for Water Quality Management Planning

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) brings together local governments, business organizations and community groups to collaborate on plans and programs for improving the Tri-State's quality of life. Members of OKI include almost 200 units of local government—cities, towns, villages and townships—in southwest Ohio (Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren Counties), northern Kentucky (Boone, Campbell and Kenton Counties), and southeast Indiana (Dearborn County).

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) is responsible for water quality management planning in the greater Cincinnati region as an outgrowth of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, more commonly referred to as the Clean Water Act. The goal of the 1972 Clean Water Act has been “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.”

Section 208 of the Clean Water Act requires that areas with substantial water quality problems develop a management plan to control pollution on a regional or “areawide” basis, often referred to as a “208” plan for the sake of brevity. OKI was selected for this planning role both by its member governments and by the governors of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. As a result, OKI developed the original water quality management plan in the period between 1974 and 1977. The resulting 1977 plan for southwest Ohio, northern Kentucky, and southeast Indiana addressed point sources of pollution from publicly owned wastewater treatment works, nonpoint sources of pollution such as storm water runoff, and intermittent sources such as combined sewers (older sewers carrying both storm water and wastewater, the combination of which may bypass the treatment plant when the volume of flow increases with heavy rains).

Since OKI's original “208” plan was completed in late 1977 and adopted in early 1978, federal funding for water quality management planning has not been consistently available, and updates to OKI's plan were commensurately limited by lack of resources. The “208” work undertaken from the fall of 2009 to the spring of 2011 has been the first opportunity for a major and fully integrated plan update for Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren Counties in southwest Ohio, made possible by federal funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and by funding appropriated in the Ohio budget for state fiscal years 2010 and 2011.

This plan update provides a current look at surface water quality conditions in southwest Ohio based on data available from federal, state and local sources (see Chapter 2). It considers development trends and their implications for water quality and wastewater treatment needs (see Chapter 3). For areas without centralized wastewater treatment, Chapter 4 provides information about onsite wastewater treatment systems such as septic tank-leach field systems and aerobic units, their water quality impacts, how they are currently regulated, and recommendations to improve their management.

The update also describes the impacts of nonpoint source pollution from diffuse sources like storm water runoff and stream bank erosion, identifies management needs and recommends

management approaches (see Chapter 5). Organizations engaged in various aspects of watershed planning in southwest Ohio are described along with their work in Chapter 6. Publicly owned wastewater facilities are identified and planning and management recommendations for them are provided in Chapter 7. Ongoing areawide or “208” planning is described in Chapter 8 along with procedures and considerations for amending the plan.

By consolidating a wealth of current information on water resources, water quality, water uses and demand and by recommending water management approaches in this plan update for southwest Ohio, OKI hopes to provide a valuable reference and a blueprint for the many agencies, organizations, and individuals who are responsible for implementing the plan. For example, by federal and state law, the Ohio EPA cannot issue construction or discharge permits for wastewater facilities that are substantially inconsistent with an adopted 208 plan, nor can federal funding be released for wastewater facilities that are substantially inconsistent with “208” planning. Consequently, an updated 208 plan for southwest Ohio should help to enable permits for wastewater treatment facilities intended to address water quality issues.

The Plan Update Process

OKI’s work on the plan update would not have been possible without the support of many planning partners. Their knowledge, resources and input have been essential in assembling and interpreting data, conducting data analysis, describing water quality problems and issues, recommending management approaches and reviewing draft materials for the plan. These planning partners have included local governments, county planning agencies, health districts, soil and water conservation districts, local storm water managers, local wastewater management agencies, watershed planning groups, and staff from the Ohio EPA, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. EPA and the U.S. Geological Survey, and the public.

Draft materials from the plan update were taken out to four county-level public meetings publicized through the media, website postings by OKI and planning partners, social media (Facebook) announcements and blast emails to about 1,000 potentially interested individuals. These four public meetings were held in May 2011 and featured an overview PowerPoint presentation on major findings of the draft plan update, including material specific to the host county, as well as a question and answer session, a brief survey, and displays staffed by OKI personnel who had worked on the plan update and could answer questions and record verbal input from attendees.

Following the public meetings, preparations were made for an additional 30-day public comment period and a public hearing on the draft plan update in late June. The draft plan update was posted on OKI’s website for review. Public notice was given through the placement of paid advertising and media advisories sent to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Cincinnati Herald* and *La Jornada*, along with website postings, social media announcements and blast emails. Public comments and a final draft plan update will be provided to Ohio EPA in July, and the final draft plan update will be presented to the OKI Executive Committee or OKI Board of Directors for action in late summer or early fall. After the plan update is adopted by OKI, the resolution indicating plan adoption will also be submitted to Ohio. In turn, after Ohio EPA reviews the plan update and it is certified by Ohio’s governor, it will be submitted to the U.S. EPA for approval.