

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, December 12, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

Today is the last day for public comment on a new proposed draft permit for wastewater discharge from the Port Townsend Paper Company. The state Department of Ecology's latest proposed draft of the wastewater permit for the paper mill increases allowed pollutant levels in light of its increased paper production. The industrial section manager for the department of Ecology put it this way, saying, "The more we have, the more we have. And the more we discharge."

One of the stickiest things about the new permit is that although federal law ties pollutant levels to production, the additional product the mill is putting out should be cleaner. Emily Toffol, the environmental engineer who authored the proposed draft on behalf of Ecology, explained saying, "There has been a shift at the facility to focus more on the recycling side of the business, but with the overall increase in production rate, it did lead to an increase in limits even though the recycling process is generally less polluting than the kraft process." Since the issuance of the previous permit, the mill shut down one of its digesters that generated kraft pulp, a particularly chemical intensive process. The mill also upgraded its cleaner cardboard recycling plant from a batch process to a continuous process. This upgrade has increased the maximum capacity of the recycling plant from 480 oven-dried tons of pulp per day to 720.

Federal Environmental Protection Agency law ties pollutant limits directly to a ratio of product output, and the Department of Ecology enforces those rules. The current wastewater permit accounts for the mill producing about 900 tons of paper products per day, while the proposed draft accounts for about 1,000 tons per day. Limits in the proposed draft allow for an increase of about 7% in the biochemical oxygen demand compared with the current permit. That means more oxygen would be consumed, leaving less for aquatic life. Less oxygen in the water can lead to stress, suffocation, and death for aquatic organisms.

Climate studies have shown that areas of the world with historically low oxygen conditions, which includes the Hood Canal, are growing in size. At the same time, new low-oxygen areas are being formed. One study in *Nature* estimates that the total volume of deadly-low-oxygen waters has quadrupled since 1960. Additionally, the proposed draft increases the limit for total suspended solids by about 2%. Total suspended solids are solid particles suspended in water that are larger than 2 microns. Increases in total suspended solids can have a negative impact on water quality and aquatic life in several ways, including decreased water clarity, clogged gills, destroyed habitats, and increased photosynthesis, leading to lower dissolved oxygen levels. Sediment can also carry chemicals attached to the particles, which can have harmful environmental effects.

The mill discharges wastewater into Port Townsend Bay through an outfall and diffuser that disperses the wastewater so it doesn't build up in any one place. As previously reported, the draft also includes new water-quality limits for benzo(a)anthracene, chlordane, and pentachlorophenol. The mill's existing permit does not list these chemicals despite the fact that both chlordane and pentachlorophenol have long been banned in the European Union. Chlordane was banned in the EU in 1981 and is now banned in most other countries with the U.S. ban beginning in 1988. Pentachlorophenol was banned in the EU in 1991 and the EPA began phasing out all use of that chemical in 2022. Both are considered carcinogenic to humans and highly toxic to aquatic organisms, and though neither are currently in use at the mill, they have been detected in the wastewater in recent years.

The Department of Ecology noted that the new limits were put in place to make sure even the historic use of these chemicals is not going to impact the wastewater the mill discharges. Public comments on the proposed

draft permit can be submitted online until midnight tonight at <https://swm.ecology.commentinput.com/?id=URCN6uFBK>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.