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STATE OF ILLINOIS  
Pollution Control Board

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August 9, 2004

*PC #2*

Ms. Dorothy Gunn, Clerk  
Illinois Pollution Control Board  
James R. Thompson Center  
100 West Randolph Street – Suite 11-500  
Chicago, IL 60601

RE: Comment on Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies  
Dissolved Oxygen Proposal  
35 Ill. Adm. Code 302.206

Illinois Pollution Control Board Docket Number R 04-25

This letter is to express Illinois Farm Bureau's support for the Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies' (IAWA) proposal regarding the modification of the water quality standard for dissolved oxygen (DO) in Illinois. Our comments are not technical in nature but present our perspective on the importance of ensuring that the state's dissolved oxygen standard is realistic and based on sound science.

Illinois Farm Bureau is a voluntary, grassroots organization whose members include about three-fourths of the farmers in the state. Illinois Farm Bureau supports the use of voluntary, best management practices for agriculture to continue the positive conservation trends we have seen in recent years.

Because farmers cannot pass along the cost of implementing programs, we support projects that are based on current scientific data and common sense, and that ensure farmers remain economically viable. We also believe that programs and projects should be based on standards and tolerances established using sound scientific information.

The proposed changes to the dissolved oxygen standard reflect the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Criteria Document (NCD) for dissolved oxygen. The IAWA request for changes to the standard is also based on an IAWA-sponsored study and review of scientific literature by researchers at Southern Illinois University, titled "An Assessment of National and Illinois Dissolved Oxygen Water Quality Criteria." The report states that the current standard is overly restrictive and should be changed to reflect research on natural fluctuations in aquatic systems and physiological tolerances of native aquatic life.



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The IAWA recommendation is to change the dissolved oxygen standard for surface waters in Illinois, except Lake Michigan and wetlands. The proposed language for the DO standard (as stated in IAWA documents) is:

"Dissolved oxygen shall be determined on a monthly basis as follows:

- a. During the months of July through February, dissolved oxygen shall not be less than a one day minimum concentration of 3.5 mg/L, and a seven day mean minimum of 4.0 mg/L. The mean minimum is defined as the average of the minimum daily recorded dissolved oxygen concentrations and should be based on a data recorder or representative grab samples.
- b. During the months of March through June, dissolved oxygen shall not be less than a one day minimum dissolved oxygen concentration of 5.0 mg/L, and a seven day mean of 6.0 mg/L. The mean is defined as the average of the daily average value and should be based on data collected by semi-continuous data loggers or estimated from the representative daily maxima and minima values."

This proposal recognizes the seasonality of natural aquatic systems in Illinois streams. At the same time, the proposed standard is protective of aquatic life in various life stages. The proposal is also equivalent to the established national dissolved oxygen standards.

The proposed standard is more realistic and updates the current standard that was set almost three decades ago. Science has advanced and the understanding of natural systems and streams in Illinois has improved greatly since the standard was originally set.

When standards are outdated and do not accurately reflect actual conditions, the standards will not achieve desired results. Local communities, municipalities, and landowners bear the burden of trying to achieve standards. Implementing standards is costly - both monetarily and time wise. It is far better to have realistic standards that are achievable. The current, questionable standard wastes time, efforts, and money and does not produce desired results.

The SIU research indicates that the current DO standard is not necessary to achieve desired ecological improvements. The more prudent course of action would be to use the IAWA proposed rule as a basis for changes to the dissolved oxygen standard.

The flawed dissolved oxygen standard is not a "stand alone" issue. Other programs are based on Illinois' current outdated DO standard. The dissolved oxygen standard is connected to the 303(d) List of Water Quality Impaired Streams and Lakes and therefore drives the development of total maximum daily loads (TMDLs).

Many waters in Illinois are listed as impaired due to an existing dissolved oxygen standard that is overly protective and does not reflect the needs of Illinois streams. IEPA is developing TMDLs for streams on the 303(d) List. The process of TMDL development is costly by itself, not to mention the millions of dollars necessary for point and nonpoint sources to implement the plans to achieve load reductions. It is therefore increasingly critical to ensure that the dissolved oxygen standard used for the development of the 303(d) List is appropriate for Illinois streams.

According to the research study conducted by SIU, there is little scientific or ecological justification for continuation of the current DO standard. The standard proposed by IAWA helps move Illinois in the right direction by establishing valid goals that both reflect the natural condition of Illinois streams and also are protective of aquatic life.

In summary, Illinois Farm Bureau supports the IAWA proposed dissolved oxygen standard because it is realistic, appropriate for Illinois, and based on sound science.

Sincerely,

*Nancy Erickson*

Nancy Erickson, Director  
Natural and Environmental Resources

Cc: Mr. Roy Harsh  
Mr. Dennis Streicher