

ILLINOIS POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
August 6, 2015

METROPOLITAN WATER)	
RECLAMATION DISTRICT OF)	
GREATER CHICAGO,)	
)	
Petitioner,)	
)	
v.)	PCB 16-29
)	(Variance - Water)
ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL)	
PROTECTION AGENCY,)	
)	
Respondent.)	

OPINION AND ORDER OF THE BOARD (by C.K. Zalewski):

On July 21, 2015, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) filed a petition for a variance from the Board’s chloride standards recently adopted in Water Quality Standards And Effluent Limitations For The Chicago Area Waterway System And Lower Des Plaines River Proposed Amendments To 35 Ill. Adm. Code 301, 302, 303, and 304, R08-9(D) (June 18, 2015) (“CAWS”). Specifically, MWRD seeks a variance from the standards in Sections 302.407(g)(2) and 302.407(g)(3) of the Board’s water pollution regulations. 35 Ill. Adm. Code 302.407(g)(2), (g)(3). After providing background on variances and briefly outlining MWRD’s petition, today’s order accepts the petition for hearing, and addresses deadlines for the recommendation of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Agency) and for the final decision of the Board.

PETITION

Under the Environmental Protection Act (Act) (415 ILCS 5/35-38 (2014)), the Board has the authority to grant a variance when a petitioner demonstrates that compliance would impose an “arbitrary or unreasonable hardship” on petitioner. *See* 415 ILCS 5/35(a) (2014); *see also* 415 ILCS 5/37(a) (2014) (burden of proof is on petitioner). A “variance is a temporary exemption from any specified rule, regulation, requirement or order of the Board.” *See* 35 Ill. Adm. Code 104.200(a)(1). However, “[i]f any person files a petition for variance from a rule or regulation within 20 days after the effective date of such rule or regulation, the operation of such rule or regulation shall be stayed as to such person pending the disposition of the petition.” 415 ILCS 5/38(b) (2014). The Board may issue a variance, with or without conditions, for up to five years, but may extend a variance if petitioner shows that it has made satisfactory progress toward compliance. *See* 415 ILCS 5/36(a), (b) (2014). The Act requires the Agency to “make a recommendation to the Board as to the disposition of the petition.” 415 ILCS 5/37(a) (2014).

This petition concerns the discharge from four of MWRD’s municipal wastewater treatment plants: the O’Brien; Calumet; Stickney; and Lemont plants (collectively, MWRD

plants). The O'Brien plant discharges to the North Shore Channel. The Calumet plant discharges to the Little Calumet River. Finally, the Stickney and Lemont plants discharge to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (CSSC). Pet. at 5. These MWRD plants are subject to the aquatic life chloride water quality standard adopted by the Board in CAWS. Pet. at 5.

MWRD states that the chloride standards adopted by the Board in CAWS "are not currently met on a consistent basis and cannot be met on a consistent basis during the term of the variance [5 years] that is being requested here." Pet. at 5. MWRD states that "it is necessary for MWRD to be issued a five-year variance for each [NPDES] [p]ermit. . . in order to avoid the imposition of an arbitrary or unreasonable hardship on the MWRD." *Id.*

Also in the petition, MWRD briefly describes the relevant pollution control equipment currently in use at the MWRD plants and provides a description of the discharges. Pet. at 6-11. MWRD refers to the NPDES permits for each of the MWRD plants for a more detailed description of those discharges, and MWRD includes an exhibit listing the recent history of chloride excursions in the discharges. Pet. at 12.

MWRD discusses potential, existing treatment options for the MWRD plants, including reverse osmosis and reducing chloride coming into the sewer system using best management practices (BMPs). Pet. at 13-14. MWRD describes reverse osmosis as cost prohibitive in the three-year time frame allowed by the Board's standards. MWRD also states that creating and implementing BMPs will take time, but the goal for achieving chloride reduction with BMPs will be July 1, 2018, "when the new chlorides standards will become legally applicable." Pet. at 15. MWRD, therefore, states that "there is no method available to bring about compliance with the new chloride standards that would not create an arbitrary and unreasonable hardship." Pet. at 17.

AGENCY RECOMMENDATION

Unless otherwise ordered by the hearing officer or the Board, the Agency is required to file its recommendation on the variance with the Board within 45 days after the filing of the petition, or at least 30 days prior to a scheduled hearing, whichever is earlier. *See* 35 Ill. Adm. Code 104.216(b). The Agency recommendation is currently due September 4, 2015, the 45th day after the petition was filed. Within 14 days after service of the Agency's recommendation, MWRD may file a response to the Agency recommendation or an amended petition. *See* 35 Ill. Adm. Code 104.220.

HEARING AND DECISION DEADLINE

Generally, the Board will hold a hearing on a variance petition if: (1) the petitioner requests a hearing; (2) the Agency or any other person files a written objection to the variance within 21 days after the newspaper notice publication, together with a written request for hearing; or (3) the Board, in its discretion, concludes that a hearing would be advisable. *See* 415 ILCS 5/37(a) (2014); *see also* 35 Ill. Adm. Code 104.224, 104.234. MWRD requested a hearing in this case. Pet. at 22. The Board accepts MWRD's petition for hearing without ruling upon the sufficiency of the petition. Before hearing, the Board or its hearing officer may issue one or more orders seeking additional information from MWRD.

The assigned hearing officer is responsible for guiding the parties toward prompt resolution of this matter through whatever status calls and hearing officer orders he determines are necessary and appropriate. Hearings will be scheduled and completed in a timely manner, consistent with the decision deadline (*see* 415 ILCS 5/38(a) (2014)), which only MWRD may extend by waiver (*see* 35 Ill. Adm. Code 101.308). If the Board fails to take final action by the decision deadline, MWRD may deem the requested variance granted for a period not to exceed one year. *See* 415 ILCS 5/38(a) (2014). Currently, the decision deadline is November 18, 2015. The Board meeting immediately before this decision deadline is scheduled for November 5, 2015.

Section 37(a) of the Act requires petitioner to provide notice of the petition to:

any person in the county in which the installation or property for which variance is sought is located who has filed with the Board a written request for notice of variance petitions, the State's attorney of such county, the Chairman of the County Board of such county, and to each member of the General Assembly from the legislative district in which that installation or property is located, and shall publish a single notice of such petition in a newspaper of general circulation in such county. 415 ILCS 5/37(a) (2014).

The Board has not received proof that notice was provided pursuant to the Act and directs MWRD to do so before hearing.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

I, John T. Therriault, Clerk of the Illinois Pollution Control Board, certify that the Board adopted the above order on August 6, 2015, by a vote of 5-0.



John T. Therriault, Clerk
Illinois Pollution Control Board