

Building a better framework for Environmental Approvals in Ontario

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) is working to create a modern regulatory system for environmental approvals.

The ministry's Modernization of Approvals Branch (MAB) is leading the implementation of a modernized approach to environmental approvals to create faster, smarter, streamlined government-to-business services, while maintaining high standards of environmental protection.

MAB is supporting modernization through partnerships that put sustainable, innovative solutions into action. The branch works with stakeholders to propose, evaluate, communicate and support modernization activities within the context of a risk-based, client centred system.

First steps

The first major milestone on modernized approvals came in 2011 with the implementation of a new, two-pronged risk-based online environmental registration system. The first stream of approvals was for more routine activities that present lower risks to the environment, risks that are well understood. Applications for these types of activities then became eligible to be submitted online through the Environmental Activity and Sector Registry (EASR). The second stream was for more unique or more complex activities that required an Environmental Compliance Approval (ECA).

Since 2011, the following sectors have qualified for EASRs, resulting in time and cost savings for clients:

- Automotive refinishing
- Commercial printing facilities
- Heating
- Non-hazardous waste transportation systems
- Small ground-mounted solar facilities
- Standby power systems.

Moving forward

In 2015, an important next step towards modernization took place when the ministry developed an electronic Environmental Compliance Approval System (eECAS). Moving to electronic service delivery means clients can apply for an ECA anywhere, pay for and then track the status of their application from their computer. The future of modernization of approvals does not stop there. The ministry is committed to modernizing other permitting, licensing and approvals

programs over time, which will result in real benefits to clients, taxpayers and the government. These include such programs as brownfields, municipal wastewater and pesticides.

To support the release of eECAS, the ministry is conducting a controlled launch. During the launch, a limited number of online applications will be received and processed to better train ministry staff and make adjustments to improve the client experience. MAB is committed to ensuring a positive client experience.

During the controlled launch period, ministry staff directly involved in the business of approvals received in-class training. The ministry also developed a series of eECAS e-learning modules available to all ministry staff to allow them to get them comfortable with the new system before launching to the public. Two online tutorials for external clients will be made available online. Check ontario.ca in the coming weeks.

Other sources of guidance to support clients include an updated ECA Guide, as well as updated or new sample applications that provide a common understanding of the level and extent of documentation required for ministry decision-making on an ECA. Through learning by example, clients receive clarity, consistency and support for thorough and complete submissions. This material is also going to be available online.

The ministry is well on the road to becoming a more modern regulator. The positive benefits include improved effectiveness, flexibility, transparency and cost efficiency. As of mid-November 2015, there were 4,014 EASR registrations, generating approximately \$31.9 million in savings for businesses that have registered since 2011.

Building an approvals system for the future

Given the ongoing success of the EASR and the potential benefits to Ontario's regulated sector, the branch continues to propose additional EASR candidates for consideration by the ministry. The branch is currently working on a draft regulation for posting on the Environmental Registry on End of Life Vehicles processing sites registering on the EASR.

Ontario is part of the North American manufacturing heartland, and home to thousands of manufacturing businesses. After California and Texas, Ontario has the most manufacturing employees of any jurisdiction in Canada or the United States. Proposing a new EASR to target low-risk, well understood manufacturing sectors under the category of 'general manufacturing' would streamline the approvals process for a wide variety of manufacturing sectors in the province, providing significant benefits to this sector while continuing to ensure these businesses operate without compromising Ontario's environmental health.

Moving forward, MAB is also looking at other potential sectors or activities for EASR consideration including:

- Short-term water takings
- Agribusiness
- Electricity Distribution Stations
- Non-emergency Tier 4 generators

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