



Lean in Air Permitting: Working Smart for Environmental Protection

Streamlining and improving air permitting processes is a high priority for environmental agencies. A new joint publication from ECOS and EPA, the *Lean in Air Permitting Guide*, explores an exciting approach that has successfully improved key dimensions of state air permitting processes. Since 2003 public environmental agencies have dramatically improved agency permitting and administrative processes using Lean process improvement methods. Agencies have achieved impressive results:

- Significant decreases in air permit development timeframes
- Decreases to or elimination of permit backlogs
- Improved completeness and quality of air permit applications
- Improved relationships with other regulators, the regulated community, and the public
- Elimination of non-value added activities, allowing permit engineers to devote more value-added time on permit development
- Improved coordination and consistency in permitting approaches

This was accomplished while ensuring equal or greater environmental protection and increasing the quality of permits. Success stories speak for themselves:

- ***Iowa Department of Natural Resources*** reduced the average time to issue standard air quality construction permits from 62 days to 6 days and eliminated 70% of the permitting process steps, moving from 23 to 7 steps.
- ***Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality*** decreased their air construction permit backlog by 55% and experienced a 50% reduction in the permit review timeframe.

Lean techniques such as value stream mapping and kaizen rapid improvement events identify and eliminate unnecessary and non-valued added process steps and activities that have built up over time. Lean efforts are not just about fixing broken processes. State agencies have found that these methods enable them to understand how their processes work on the ground and to build a culture of continuous improvement. By getting process activities and procedures to function smoothly and consistently, agencies free staff time to focus on higher value activities more directly linked to environmental protection. While successfully implementing Lean requires hard work and commitment, the results can be impressive.

The *Lean in Air Permitting Guide* will help you better understand the potential value and results that can be achieved by applying Lean improvement methods to air permitting processes. To get a copy of the Guide or for more information visit:



EPA Administrative Lean Initiative: <http://www.epa.gov/lean/admin.htm>

ECOS Lean Government Project: <http://www.ecos.org/section/projects/?id=2292>