

What is a Water Quality-based Intake Credit?

A water quality-based intake credit is a regulatory tool that—in simplest terms—does not make a discharger remove pollutants from their discharge if those pollutants come from intake water to their system. There are several special conditions/circumstances that must be met in order to qualify for an intake credit. Those conditions are listed below and are also laid out in the flowchart below.

Under What Conditions Would an Intake Credit be Allowed?

- An intake credit can only be used if the waterbody is not meeting standards for the specific pollutant of interest. If that is the case, the discharge must not cause, or have the reasonable potential to cause or contribute to, an increase in the levels of the pollutant in that waterbody.
- The facility must not contribute any additional mass of the pollutant to its wastewater.
- The intake water must come from the same body of water that receives the discharge.
- The facility must not change the identified intake pollutant chemically or physically in any way that would cause negative water quality impacts to occur—impacts that would not occur if the pollutant had been left in the waterbody.
- The facility must not increase the pollutant concentration at the point of discharge as compared to the pollutant concentration in the intake water.
- The timing and location of the discharge must not cause negative water quality impacts to occur—impacts that would not occur if the pollutants had been left in the waterbody.

Is the Water Quality-based Intake Credit proposed in the draft rule the same as the more familiar Technology-based Intake Credit that is already in use?

No. The technology-based intake credits that have traditionally been used by states have not accounted for meeting water quality standards.

In order to protect water quality, this newer approach does not allow the discharger to increase an identified intake pollutant in its discharge (as specified at left).

Why is Ecology proposing to add the Intake Credit tool to the Surface Water Quality Standards?

- Water quality-based intake credits could be a useful tool in some situations where waters are not meeting criteria. In these cases dischargers will not be forced to remove pollutants that entered their systems from intake waters. Ecology does not expect this tool to be widely used, but in circumstances where all the conditions are met it could be useful.
- This type of intake credit language has been adopted into the water quality rules of a number of states including California, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and New York, although the credits are only included in a limited number of actual permits.
- Oregon recently adopted language for intake credits as part of its rulemaking for human health criteria. This language can be found in OAR 340-045-0105, and includes the general requirements listed above.



Proposed rule language on Intake Credits

1. Ecology proposes to add a new section to the water quality standards rule at WAC 173-201A-460 that addresses situations where facilities bring in and discharge levels of background pollutants contained in the intake water, referred to as intake credits.
2. The proposed new language is applicable to the granting of intake credits for use with water quality based effluent limits (WQBELs).
3. Proposed language clarifies the conditions where intake credits would be allowed for determining reasonable potential and water quality-based effluent limits (WQBEL) that accounts for pollutants already present in the intake water, and would only be allowed when the mass and concentration of effluent is the same or less than intake water, and there is “no net addition” of the pollutant.

