



Our mission is to champion a healthy environment for a thriving Montana.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

ANNUAL PLAN

FY2025

Updated September 1, 2024

The [Montana Department of Environmental Quality](#) is responsible for regulating air quality, water quality, underground storage tanks, automobile wrecking facilities, hazardous waste facilities, solid waste management systems, and mining operations; and for the siting and needs analyses of large-scale energy facilities. In addition, the department is the lead agency for reclamation and cleanup activities related to the federal and state superfund programs and leaking underground storage tanks, and for regulation and permitting of mining conducted on private, state, and federal lands. This work is completed through four programs - Central Management, Water Quality, Waste Management & Remediation, and Air, Energy, & Mining. The Petroleum Tank Compensation Board and the Libby Asbestos Superfund Oversight Committee are also attached for administrative purposes.

The department works in partnership with the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Energy, and the Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. Congress gave the EPA the initial responsibility for development and implementation of environmental protection, but many federal statutes contain preference for delegation of the program to the states when the state can demonstrate capacity to carry it out. This arrangement establishes state-federal environmental goals and priorities with the funding and flexibility to achieve desired results. These joint activities become the basis of future agreements and long-term strategic planning.

CENTRAL SERVICES

The department's central services programs are responsible for agency-wide administration, management, planning, evaluation, and support. They include the director's staff, a centralized legal pool, the Montana Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Facility Siting Act functions, public affairs, the enforcement program, human resources, information management and technology, financial services, records management, safety, emergency management, and continuous process improvement.

AIR, ENERGY, & MINING DIVISION

The Air, Energy, & Mining Division (AEMD) permits and regulates environmentally protective and productive operations in air, hard rock mining, opencut mining, and coal mining industries according to program statutory authority. The permitting and regulatory work includes extensive coordination with other programs to develop environmental review documents that comply with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), including environmental assessments and environmental impact statements. AEMD includes the State Energy Office, or Energy Bureau, which promotes and improves Montanan's access to energy efficiency and alternative energy sources while improving the state's energy security by offering financing mechanisms, technical assistance, and education for public and private entities.

WATER QUALITY DIVISION

The Water Quality Division protects public health and water quality in the state of Montana. This is accomplished through the financing and technical assistance provided for community water and wastewater systems; the development of water quality restoration plans; managing a State-wide monitoring network; subdivision review; monitoring compliance of public water systems; and water discharge permitting. The division achieves this through coordination with the public and regulated community by proposing rules, drafting policy, and developing water quality standards.

WASTE MANAGEMENT & REMEDIATION DIVISION

The Waste Management & Remediation Division protects human health and the environment by preventing exposure to contaminants, working with Montana communities and businesses to implement effective material management and cleanup strategies, and overseeing compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. It oversees and conducts or supports remedial investigation and efficient, cost-effective cleanup activities at state and federal Superfund sites; supervises voluntary cleanup activities; reclaims abandoned minelands; implements corrective actions at sites; and administrators regulatory waste management programs.

AGENCY-WIDE STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

 Strategic Outcome #1	CITIZEN SERVICE, ACCOUNTABILITY, & EFFICIENCY	
	DEQ is continuing to shift the agency's approach regarding routine activities to include more enterprising interactions with customers and stakeholders; and efforts internally to cooperate, share information, and be increasingly efficient in the work we do. This is measured by accounting for proactive outbound touches -- which center on improving the citizen experience—for example, making it easier to complete a transaction in a timely manner—ultimately improving voluntary compliance, making the delivery of services more cost effective, and strengthening our customers' trust in government.	
	Key Measures	• Sustain over 10 proactive outbound touches/employee/month (50,000/year for the agency); Learn lessons from them, improve. • Monthly report outs from each Program and Division accounting for proactive outbound touches – Monthly (4,167 agency proactive touches). • Review of proactive outbound touches (numbers) and success stories to foster relationships with citizens, to ensure continued satisfaction with the work we do, and to prevent problems before they arise – Annually (complete 50,000 agency proactive outbound touches).



Strategic Outcome

#2

BUILD AND MAINTAIN A WORKFORCE THAT MAINTAINS AGENCY VALUES

Sustain strong and growing employee wellness initiative, employee mentorship program, conduct monthly staff technical trainings.

DEQ's Senior Leadership will continue to transition and lead the agency regarding remote work initiatives; lead performance management efforts with on-time mid-year check-ins, annual performance reviews and increased employee flexibility, happiness, and retainment. Improvement in these areas for employees will translate into better experience and interactions with stakeholders.

- Create a culture of high development by using a strengths-based strategy to design employee experience, from recruitment, retention personnel development, to performance.
- Continue to develop and shift manager mindsets from being bosses to being coaches who develop employee performance and have regular coaching conversations to provide meaningful feedback.

Key Measures

- Access recruitment/retention plans and execution—days to fill vacant positions to <21 days.
- Reduce and maintain employee turnover/vacancy rates to <10%.
- Complete 6-month and 12-month employee performance evaluations –100% completion
- Monthly Wellness trainings –1 per month
- Technical trainings offered to all staff – 1 per month



Strategic Outcome

#3

DELIVER ON eGOV INITIATIVES

Press forward to identify outdated systems and processes that can be improved using technology. Prioritize system updates or process updates that will bring the largest benefit to groups of the agency's stakeholders.

- **Drive proactive customer service, accountability, and customer service through improved use technology.**
- **Develop efficient processes using technology that save staff and the public time over the status quo.**
- **Educate users of the systems on the new, more efficient ways of interacting with the agency.**

Key Measures

- Opencut mining application system working through development this FY.
- Subdivisions application integration in place this FY.
 - % of plans submitted online for Plan and Spec and Subdivision review
- Underground storage permit system transitioning toward new platform this FY.
- Records management system upgrade in progress this FY.
- Develop public facing enforcement program dashboard this FY.
- Develop and begin testing use of electronic field forms for at least one additional DEQ program this FY.
- Complete three State Superfund Unit (SSU) projects to automate public documents.
- % of water quality field season work done electronically in FY 25.

 Strategic Outcome #4	RED TAPE RELIEF & REGULATORY REFORM	
	Continue to make common sense regulatory reform measures through FY 25 through prioritization of rules reviewed by the agency. Evaluate rules that are ripe for advancement through the legislative/executive streamlining efforts with a focus on effectiveness and boldness.	
	Key Measures	- Evaluate agency rulemaking needs and calendar timelines to successfully update identified and required rules prior to 2025 legislative session. - Monthly meeting of agency rule review team to discuss priorities, timelines and stay on track –monthly occurrence. - Identification and development of red tape relief concepts to ensure proposed legislation is successful in 2025 session.

 Strategic Outcome #5	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATION	
	Prioritize the development of relationships with stakeholders across the state of Montana. Listen to diverse interests and consider perspectives in evaluating how the agency does its work. Tell the DEQ story in various ways through proactive communication strategies.	
	Key Measures	- Celebrate DEQ successes and wins. Establish, enhance and maintain relationships with federal, state, local, tribal agencies and consistent, involved respectful stakeholders. - Communicate positive information to the public by one positive, proactive press release per month — monthly. - Reach out to Montana’s tribes — each tribe annually. - Implement agency-wide professional, consistent external communications — 10 trainings in FY 25.

 Strategic Outcome #6	INSPECTION & PERMITTING EFFICIENCY AND IMPROVEMENT	
	Produce accurate, complete, and clear documents that withstand legal scrutiny, including thorough and consistent Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) analysis. Documents and related analysis will be developed collaboratively with the support of management, will identify and confirm underlying authority for review and decision-making, and will undergo appropriate and consistent legal review. We will increase and maintain site inspections, by establishing goals to meet or exceed numbers reached in 2024.	
	Key Measures	• Meet all annual inspection goals. • Opencut = 250 • Coal = 134 • Hard Rock = 125 • Field Services = 180 • MEPA templates and process outline. • Each Bureau will provide a report-out from each applicable section supervisor on number of inspections completed in 2024 and scheduled for 2025 – December 2024. • Air Quality and Mining Bureau will prepare work plan/guidance to be consistent in appropriate communication of violations and noncompliance, issuance of appropriate written notifications, and timely resolution. – 2nd Quarter 2025. • Refine and implement an Air, Energy and Mining Division MEPA template (to address programmatic and legal input) that is largely consistent across each section, unless directed differently by underlying statute—March 2025.



Strategic Outcome

#7

ADVANCE EMPLOYEE LEARNING AND CERTIFICATION

As technology advances and workplace strategies evolve, there is a need for staff to align with these changes in terms of knowledge and skills. We support staff growth and will continue to set the stage for learning opportunities by discussing goals, areas of focus, and opportunities for training, certification, etc. There are a growing number of new employees and training will directly impact our productivity and performance.

Key Measures

- Provide 10 training opportunities per Bureau in FY2025.
- Report on training and staff impacted for FY 2025 – July 2025.
- Develop budget to sustain training, while maintaining existing staff development and retention – July 2025.



Strategic Outcome

#8

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Records management ensures that institutional records of vital historical, fiscal, and legal value are identified and preserved, and that non-essential records are discarded in a timely manner according to established guidelines. Mining is one of the oldest and most important industries to Montana – which results in voluminous records. The Mining Bureau continues to transition from traditional methods to technology enabled business processes.

Key Measures

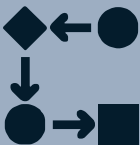
- Establish electronic file naming conventions for the Coal Mining and Opencut Mining Sections and ensure that those naming conventions are used by staff – July 2025.
- # of boxes QA/QC'd and shredded in FY2025 – July 2025.
- # existing electronic Hard Rock Mining Section records transitioned into Document Management System—in FY 2025—July 2025.
- Coal Mining Section to review/assess/condense 50 boxes of records from the Billings Field office and send the resulting boxes out for scanning—October 2025.

 Strategic Outcome #9	INCREASE CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH TOOLS DESIGNED FOR BETTER STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	
	Utilize two tools that were developed in FY24 for better stakeholder engagement in two WMRD challenge/priority areas: • Butte One-map. This shows all superfund projects in the Butte area. The interactive map allows users to zoom in on a specific project area. All agencies involved in remediation will use the map and logos are incorporated to demonstrate collaboration. The map will be posted on our website and DEQ-lead sites will have links to current status. • Petroleum tank release cleanup process flow map and illustration of roles and responsibilities. This is used with stakeholders and with owners of new releases to illustrate the cleanup process and who is responsible for what. This should reduce confusion among our stakeholders.	
	Key Measures	• # of Butte public meetings where Butte One Map is used • # of agencies and organizations that use the Butte One Map • # of times petroleum process flow brochure is shared • # of meetings held with owners of new releases to explain process and roles and get positive, proactive face time with our customers

 Strategic Outcome #10	MOVE A MINIMUM OF TWO LEGACY SITES FORWARD TO THE NEXT STEP IN THE CLEANUP PROCESS	
	Identify and select at least two sites to deliberately move forward in FY25. These are challenging sites with barriers to remediation. Moving them forward in the process will achieve DEQ's mission to champion a healthy environment for a thriving Montana, will uphold our values of accountability and excellence, and will take a burden off DEQ staff	
	Key Measures	• # of sites moved • # of steps advanced

WATER QUALITY DIVISION STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

 Strategic Outcome #11	CROSS PROGRAM SITE VISITS TO INFORM OUR WORK AND CREATE FEEDBACK LOOPS FOR MEANINGFUL REGULATION	
	We administer the Clean Water Act, Montana Water Quality Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act. This oversight uniquely positions the division to be able to connect engineers who review design standards with the inspectors, technical assistance providers, and regulated community to take a deeper look at regulations for drinking water and wastewater. By looking deeper at the standards and processes, the division hopes to make meaningful updates and changes that continue to protect human health and the environment, while also eliminating or reducing red tape.	
	Key Measures	• Number of Water Quality Division staff that participate in a site visit with other DEQ programs. • Begin implementation in field season of 2025, and complete during field season 2025. • All sections (14) participating in one site visit by July 2025.

 Strategic Outcome #12	EACH SECTION IMPLEMENT PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS IDENTIFIED IN 2023-24 PROCESS MAPPING SESSIONS.	
	There are 14 sections in the division. Each section of the division will implement process improvements identified in 2023-24 process mapping sessions leading to improved value stream for customer service.	
	Key Measures	• # of sections implementing process improvements • # of process improvement initiatives