

EAW FACTSHEET



What is an EAW?

An **Environmental Assessment Worksheet** (EAW) is defined by state statute as a “brief document which is designed to set out the basic facts necessary to determine whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required for a proposed action.” The purpose of the EAW process is to disclose information about potential environmental impacts of a project. **It is not an approval process.** The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) is the state agency that issues rules about EAWs.

What causes an EAW to be prepared?

EAWs are required by law on certain large projects, but can also be ordered by a Responsible Government Unit (RGU) if it feels that there is the potential for significant environmental effects. In addition, a group of 100 citizens in Minnesota can petition an RGU to conduct an EAW. An RGU then must decide if the petition has merit.

The EAW process involves three primary steps

Step 1 – EAW Preparation

The project proposer supplies all necessary data to the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU), which is assigned responsibility to conduct the review and prepare the final EAW document according to the EQB rules. Crow Wing County is the RGU on most development-related EAWs, but the RGU could also be a state agency, such as MPCA. The RGU prepares the EAW in consultation with the project proposer. It consists of a standard form supplied by the EQB and relevant supporting materials. Costs associated with EAW preparation are the responsibility of the proposer. The county often charges an administrative cost for its role in preparing and processing an EAW.

Step 2 – Public Comment Period

An EAW is a public document. Public notice is given of its availability for review in the local newspaper. The EAW is also distributed to various local, state, and federal agencies along with the local library. The comment period is 30 calendar days. Any person may review and comment in writing on an EAW. Comments must be submitted to the RGU by the end of the 30 day comment period.

Step 3 – Decision on Need for an EIS

The RGU responds to the comments received and makes a decision on the need for an EIS based on the EAW, comments received, and responses to the comments based on Minnesota Rules 4410.1700, subparts 6 and 7. Findings supporting this decision are also adopted by the decision-making body of the RGU (such as the County Board). The RGU and other units of government may require modifications to the project to mitigate environmental impacts as disclosed through the EAW process. If a **negative declaration** on the need for an EIS is determined, then the other permits and approvals can be issued and the project can move forward. If the RGU determines that an EIS is necessary, permits/approvals cannot be issued until an EIS is completed.

Where can I get more information?

The EQB publishes a “Guide to Minnesota Environmental Review Rules” that further details the environmental review process. It is available online at <http://www.eqb.state.mn.us>

Environmental Review Types

EAW:

A screening tool to determine whether a full environmental impact statement is needed. The worksheet contains 20 questions document focusing on the project's environmental setting, the potential for environmental harm, and plans to reduce the harm. About 150 worksheets are completed each year in Minnesota.

Time Frame: 2 to 6 months

EIS:

An in-depth analysis used for major development projects that will significantly change the environment. The statement covers social and economic influences, as well as environmental impact, and looks at alternate ways to proceed with the project.

Time Frame: 1 year or more

AUAR: Alternative Urban Areawide Review

An AUAR is a type of environmental assessment used to assess potential cumulative environmental impacts from future urban development over a broad geographic area. The AUAR process includes the preparation of a “Mitigation Plan” that identifies methods to avoid, minimize, or mitigate identified environmental impacts as future development takes place.

Time Frame: 6 months or more