

United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of Water
Regulations and Standards
Washington, DC 20460

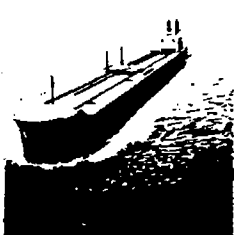
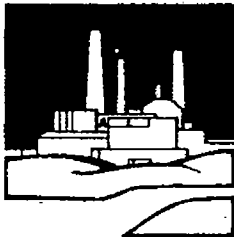
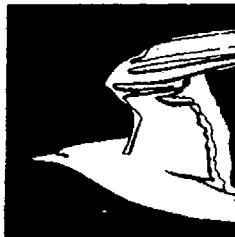
May 1, 1986



Water

EPA 440/5-86-001

QUALITY CRITERIA for WATER 1986



Phosphate Phosphorus

Although a total phosphorus criterion to control nuisance aquatic growths is not presented, it is believed that the following rationale to support such a criterion, which currently is evolving, should be considered.

Total phosphate phosphorus concentrations in excess of 100 ug/L P may interfere with coagulation in water treatment plants. When such concentrations exceed 25 ug/L at the time of the spring turnover on a volume-weighted basis in lakes or reservoirs, they may occasionally stimulate excessive or nuisance growths of algae and other aquatic plants. Algal growths impart undesirable tastes and odors to water, interfere with water treatment, become aesthetically unpleasant, and alter the chemistry of the water supply. They contribute to the phenomenon of cultural eutrophication.

To prevent the development of biological nuisances and to control accelerated or cultural eutrophication, total phosphates as phosphorus (P) should not exceed 50 ug/L in any stream at the point where it enters any lake or reservoir, nor 25 ug/L within the lake or reservoir. A desired goal for the prevention of plant nuisances in streams or other flowing waters not discharging directly to lakes or impoundments is 100 ug/L total P (Mackenthun, 1973). Most relatively uncontaminated lake districts are known to have surface waters that contain from 10 to 30 ug/L total phosphorus as P (Hutchinson, 1957).

The majority of the Nation's eutrophication problems are associated with lakes or reservoirs and currently there are more

data to support the establishment of a limiting phosphorus level in those waters than in streams or rivers that do not directly impact such water. There are natural conditions, also, that would dictate the consideration of either a more or less stringent phosphorus level. Eutrophication problems may occur in waters where the phosphorus concentration is less than that indicated above and, obviously, such waters would need more stringent nutrient limits. Likewise, there are those waters within the Nation where phosphorus is not now a limiting nutrient and where the need for phosphorus limits is substantially diminished. Such conditions are described in the last paragraph of this rationale.

There are two basic needs in establishing a phosphorus criterion for flowing waters: one is to control the development of plant nuisances within the flowing water and, in turn, to control and prevent animal pests that may become associated with such plants; the other is to protect the downstream receiving waterway, regardless of its proximity in linear distance. It is evident that a portion of that phosphorus that enters a stream or other flowing waterway eventually will reach a receiving lake or estuary either as a component of the fluid mass, as bed load sediments that are carried downstream, or as floating organic materials that may drift just above the stream's bed or float on its water's surface. Superimposed on the loading from the inflowing waterway, a lake or estuary may receive additional phosphorus as fallout from the air shed or as a direct introduction from shoreline areas.

Another method to control the inflow of nutrients, particularly phosphates, into a lake is that of prescribing an annual loading to the receiving water. Vollenweider (1973) suggests total phosphorus (P) loadings in grams per square meter of surface area per year that will be a critical level for eutrophic conditions within the receiving waterway for a particular water volume where the mean depth of the lake in meters is divided by the hydraulic detention time in years. Vollenweider's data suggest a range of loading values that should result in oligotrophic lake water quality.

Mean Depth/Hydraulic Detention Time (meters/year)	Oligotrophic or Permissible Loading (grams/meter ² /year)	Eutrophic or Critical Loading (grams/meter ² /year)
0.5	0.07	0.14
1.0	0.10	0.20
2.5	0.16	0.32
5.0	0.22	0.45
7.5	0.27	0.55
10.0	0.32	0.63
25.0	0.50	1.00
50.0	0.71	1.41
75.0	0.87	1.73
100.0	1.00	2.00

There may be waterways wherein higher concentrations or loadings of total phosphorus do not produce eutrophy, as well as those waterways wherein lower concentrations or loadings of total

phosphorus may be associated with populations of nuisance organisms. Waters now containing less than the specified amounts of phosphorus should not be degraded by the introduction of additional phosphates.

It should be recognized that a number of specific exceptions can occur to reduce the threat of phosphorus as a contributor to lake eutrophy:

1. Naturally occurring phenomena may limit the development of plant nuisances.
2. Technological or cost-effective limitations may help control introduced pollutants.
3. Waters may be highly laden with natural silts or colors which reduce the penetration of sunlight needed for plant photosynthesis.
4. Some waters morphometric features of steep banks, great depth, and substantial flows contribute to a history of no plant problems.
5. Waters may be managed primarily for waterfowl or other wildlife.
7. In some waters nutrient other than phosphorus is limiting to plant growth: the level and nature of such limiting nutrient would not be expected to increase to an extent that would influence eutrophication.
6. In some waters phosphorus control cannot be sufficiently effective under present technology to make phosphorus the limiting nutrient.

No national criterion is presented for phosphate phosphorus for the control of eutrophication.