

Whole Effluent Toxicity (WET) Program and WET Testing Laboratory

Science Services Environmental Risk Assessment Program administers a WET program in support of the Department's municipal and industrial wastewater discharge permitting program. WET is the ability of an effluent to cause harmful effects on the aquatic life in the receiving waters. The effluents are tested by exposing small fish and crustaceans to various concentrations of the effluent. These tests are known as bioassays. WET testing is required in discharge permits and the Department operates its own testing laboratory under contract with the University of Maryland. This allows the Department to independently test effluents for toxicity.

When an effluent demonstrates an unacceptable level of toxicity, the discharger is required to conduct a toxicity reduction evaluation (TRE) to determine the cause of the toxicity and to take steps to remove the toxicity. When completed, the discharger is required to retest its effluent to confirm the reduction of toxicity.

Since beginning this program in 1986 the Department has enjoyed excellent cooperation with the responsible dischargers to successfully eliminate effluent toxicity when it is demonstrated. To date, 96 cases of WET have been eliminated through this process. Currently, 14 industrial and municipal TREs are ongoing with many of those nearing final resolution.

TARSA will continue to maintain its WET testing laboratory to monitor municipal and industrial discharges for aquatic toxicity and aggressively work with discharge permit holders to eliminate effluent toxicity and to ensure that wastewater discharges remain nontoxic.

For more information call:
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