



ENVIRONMENTAL UNIT

EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION WASTE MANAGEMENT

“Exploration and Production Waste” (E&P waste) is a term of art under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act that distinguishes it from other regulated hazardous wastes. E&P wastes are wastes intrinsically derived from primary field operations and uniquely associated with exploration, development, or production of oil or natural gas (as distinct from transportation or refining operations). Examples of E&P waste include: flowback fluids, produced water, drilling fluids, oily waste, drill cuttings, and tank bottoms. Spilled or released product (crude oil or condensate) at primary field exploration operations and production facilities are also considered E&P waste.

COGCC regulates E&P waste in Colorado.¹ COGCC requires operators to properly store, handle, transport, treat, and recycle or dispose of E&P waste to prevent threatened or actual significant adverse environmental impacts to air, water, soil or biological resources. COGCC has permitting, constructing, operating, and closure criteria for facilities that store or treat E&P waste, such as pits and Centralized E&P Waste Management Facilities.

COGCC also oversees investigation and cleanup of all E & P waste spills to protect public health and the environment. COGCC has published numeric standards for contaminant concentrations in soil and groundwater that must be achieved before a site is closed. COGCC will not release the financial assurance of an operator until the cleanup goals are met. If a spill of E&P waste impacts surface waters of the state, COGCC coordinates the spill response and clean up with the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment.

¹ The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environmental regulates “Commercial Facilities,” which can accept both E&P waste and other kinds of solid or hazardous waste. Similarly, for commercial disposal wells, COGCC and CDPHE have authority over different aspects of the operations and both have permit requirements that must be followed.