


NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Division of Water, Bureau of Water Permits
625 Broadway, Albany, New York 12233-3505
P: (518) 402-8111 | F: (518) 402-9029
www.dec.ny.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: Regional Water Engineers

FROM: Robert Wither, Chief, South Permit Section 

SUBJECT: Solar Panel Construction Stormwater Permitting/SWPPP Guidance

DATE: April 6, 2018

Issue

The Department is seeing an increase in the number of solar panel construction projects across New York State. This has resulted in an increase in the number of questions on Construction General Permit (CGP) and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) requirements from design professionals because the current CGP (GP-0-15-002) does not include a specific reference to the SWPPP requirements for solar panel projects in Tables 1 and 2 of Appendix B. To address this issue, the Division of Water (DOW) has developed the following guidance on CGP/SWPPP requirements for the different types of solar panel projects.

Scenario 1

The DOW considers solar panel projects designed and constructed in accordance with the following criteria to be a "*Land clearing and grading for the purposes of creating vegetated open space (i.e. recreational parks, lawns, meadows, fields)*" type project as listed in Table 1, Appendix B of the CGP. Therefore, the SWPPP for this type of project will typically just need to address erosion and sediment controls.

1. Solar panels are constructed on post or rack systems and elevated off the ground surface,
2. The panels are spaced apart so that rain water can flow off the down gradient side of the panel and continue as sheet flow across the ground surface*,
3. For solar panels constructed on slopes, the individual rows of solar panels are generally installed along the contour so rain water sheet flows down slope*,
4. The ground surface below the panels consist of a well-established vegetative cover (see "Final Stabilization" definition in Appendix A of the CGP),
5. The project does not include the construction of any traditional impervious areas (i.e. buildings, substation pads, gravel access roads or parking areas, etc.),
6. Construction of the solar panels will not alter the hydrology from pre-to post development conditions (see Appendix A of the CGP, for definition of "Alter the hydrology..."). Note: The design professional shall perform the necessary site assessment/hydrology analysis to make this determination.

*Refer to Maryland's "Stormwater Design Guidance- Solar Panel Installations" attached for guidance on panel installation.

**See notes below for additional criteria.

Scenario 2

If the design and construction of the solar panels meets all the criteria above, except for item 6, the project will fall under the "*All other construction activities that include the construction or reconstruction of impervious area or alter the hydrology from pre-to post development conditions, and are not listed in Table 1*" project type as listed in Table 2, Appendix B of the CGP. Therefore, the SWPPP for this type of project must address post-construction stormwater practices designed in accordance with the sizing criteria in Chapter 4 of the NYS Stormwater Management Design Manual, dated January 2015 (Note: Chapter 10 for projects in NYC EOH Watershed). The Water Quality Volume (WQv)/Runoff Reduction Volume (RRv) sizing criteria can be addressed by designing and constructing the solar panels in accordance with the criteria in items 1 – 4 above, however, the quantity control sizing criteria (Cpv, Qp and Qf) from Chapter 4 (or 10) of the Design Manual must still be addressed, unless one of the waiver criteria from Chapter 4 can be applied. **See notes below for additional criteria.

**** Notes**

- **Item 1:** For solar panel projects where the panels are mounted directly to the ground (i.e. no space below panel to allow for infiltration of runoff), the SWPPP must address post-construction stormwater management controls designed in accordance with the sizing criteria in Chapter 4 of the NYS Stormwater Management Design Manual, dated January 2015 (Note: Chapter 10 for projects in NYC EOH Watershed).

- **Item 5:** For solar panel projects that include the construction of traditional impervious areas (i.e. buildings, substation pads, gravel access roads or parking areas, etc.), the SWPPP must address post-construction stormwater management controls for those areas of the project. This applies to both Scenario 1 and 2 above.

cc: Carol Lamb-Lafay, BWP
Dave Gasper, BWP