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## **Big Picture Thinking**

This is the second article focused at providing assistance to small and medium sized facilities regarding environmental permitting. This installment will discuss what we like to call “Big Picture Thinking”. What is “Big Picture Thinking”? In short it is a process of taking a step back and evaluating all of the potential issues that may make a proposed project difficult to make a reality. Many times facilities will obtain the necessary permits or the originally perceived “critical path approval” only to find that their project never becomes a reality because of an unconsidered or an underestimated issue.

Some applicants will identify what they perceive to be the most difficult permit and begin focusing all of their resources on obtaining that permit while promising themselves to return to the other approvals later. Applicants may spend significant amounts of money hiring consultants and developing data for an application for the permit. Then when they return to obtaining the other approvals they find that an originally thought less important issue is unresolvable. Some common examples are obtaining the air construction permit only to find that there is not an acceptable solution to waste water treatment or disposal, or that there is not an adequate source of water for the facility. Some other typically underestimated considerations are local zoning issues and public acceptance of a project.

Many facilities require third party approvals from agencies and bodies other than the Department of Environmental Quality. A common misperception is that the issuance of a permit or permits by the Department somehow overrules the need to obtain approvals from entities such as municipal and county boards, local water or wastewater authorities or Federal Agencies.

Because of the foregoing, the Department considers a proposed activity as “a project”. Which means that we want all of the environmental issues to be adequately considered before we make decisions on individual permits. This is especially true if a public hearing may be required.

Our experience tells us is that every project is potentially different and that time spent evaluating potential issues on the front end will save time and money in the final analysis. The Department generally, and the Environmental Permits Division specifically, has devoted a significant amount of effort in institutionalizing “Big Picture” thinking into our processes and our staff. We have a number of tools that we can share with anyone who is considering a project that may require environmental approvals. Included in our tool box is a willing staff of engineers and scientists who will cheerfully answer questions and assist potential permit applicants.

The Department has developed a number of electronic tools to provide information, applications and assistance documents to our customers on demand. We will describe what those tools are and how to access them in an upcoming article. You may contact me, Harry Wilson at (601)961-5073 or at [Harry\\_Wilson@deq.state.ms.us](mailto:Harry_Wilson@deq.state.ms.us).