

Detailed Lean Improvement Project Report

For the June 1, 2014, through December 31, 2014, reporting period

Agency name:

Department of Ecology

Improvement project title:

Water Rights Processing: Phases 1, 2, and 3

Date improvement project initiated:

06/28/2011

Summary:

This Lean project was targeted at improving the water right permitting process. Due to the complexity of the permitting process, this Lean project was held in three phases:

- Phase 1 – Application Intake
- Phase 2 – Documentation and Investigation
- Phase 3 – Permit Maintenance

The Department of Ecology improved the water rights permitting process by:

- Reducing the application backlog 17 percent from 7,018 to 5,814.
- Increasing the number of applicants that are current with their permit development schedules by 54 percent from 1912 overdue events to 882 (November 18, 2014, data).
- Improving communication about water availability within each watershed, and streamlining and documenting our processes.

Details:

Description of the problem: Legislation enacted in 2011 SESH1087 required Ecology to review its water rights application procedures, eliminate unnecessary steps, and decrease the time required to issue decisions. The legislation also required Ecology to implement changes to improve water rights processing within its statutory authority.

Description of the improvement: With the assistance of a Boeing Lean Facilitator, Ecology staff experts in water rights processing participated in three Lean workshops to examine and streamline the water rights process.

The Water Resources Program's Lean Team has been systematically working through the recommendations made in the three Lean workshops. Improvements are described below.

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Specific results achieved since last report:

- Our Water Rights Tracking System (WRTS) now tracks the date we receive an application and the date Ecology considers the application complete to better identify when it can move on for further processing.
- Established a process to capture water right applicant and owner email addresses to improve frequency and efficiency in communicating with our customers.
- Revised our extension form to prevent customers from sending in fees when they aren't required.
- Adopted a new standard for working with our permit files – we will correct any errors in files as we come across them and are committed to not passing on errors for the next person to deal with.
- Significantly improved the process we use to remind permit holders when they have a deadline. Instead of sending late notices, we now have an automated process that generates letters to send a pre-minder letter.
- Our WRTS Coordinators have done extensive data cleaning in the system to provide a more accurate picture of overdue permit management events. The number of overdue permit milestone events has dropped by about 50 percent.
- Reduced our pending water right application backlog by 17 percent by creating a process to systematically contact all pending applicants, within a basin, to see if they still need the water they were applying for.
- We revised our mitigation guidance.
- We wrote an extensive Investigator's Manual, aimed at capturing the best practices and wisdom of investigating water rights in the office and in the field.
- We developed a training plan and are incorporating training into our program culture.

How we involved customers or stakeholders in this effort:

We had external customers attend all three workshops, and have been reporting significant implementations to our stakeholder group, the Water Resources Advisory Committee.

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