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State Policies for Aquaculture Effluents and Solid Wastes in the Northeast Region

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This publication provides a comparative review of the current status of state policies for disposition of effluents and solid wastes from aquaculture production facilities in the northeastern region. It include.s information on, federal legislation and technical guidelines for aquaculture discharges and the role of two federal agencies involved with administering water quality programs. Regulatory policies of the twelve states and the District of Columbia, all located within the region served by the Northeastern Regional Aquaculture Center (NRAC) are summarized with regard to effluent discharges to surface waters and disposal of two types of solid waste: settled solids (sludge) and mortalities (dead, fish or shellfish). Policies for disposition of offal and other wastes from facilities that process fishery and aquaculture products are beyond the scope of this publication and are not included. Because state policies and regulations are subject to periodic review and revision, this publication is intended to be used as a general introduction and initial source for contacts and other information. Specific requirements for an existing facility or proposed operation must be determined through individual consultation with the lead regulatory agency (or its regional office) within the state.

Introduction

Growth of the aquaculture industry and its use of high quality water resources has attracted the attention of state regulatory agencies responsible for surface water discharges and solid waste disposal. These agencies, primarily engaged in controlling wastes from a wide range of industrial and municipal activities, view aquaculture as a small but developing agricultural industry with a significant potential to degrade water quality. Because commercial aquaculture is in the early stages of development in most states, regulators have tended to classify fish farming as an industrial activity requiring wastewater treatment different from other forms of agriculture. These factors and a general unfamiliarity with aquaculture production technologies, waste characteristics and their impact on different categories of receiving waters (lakes, rivers, streams, etc.) have precluded development of uniform standards and policies based on technical data and environmental risk assessment.

In states with poorly defined or with no policies for managing aquaculture wastes, identifying and obtaining required permits can be a confusing and time consuming process. Permit requirements are often determined on a case-by-case basis using regulations and technical standards not