

Environmental agency ready with 48-hour turnaround

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DAILY MAIL STAFF Starting Monday, businesses and other entities will see faster action on their environmental permit applications, but sometimes that action will be an order to try again, Environmental Protection Secretary **Mike Callaghan** said.

In November, Callaghan promised businesses that by 2002 they would get feedback from the agency within 48 hours of submitting a permit. While the effort took a little longer than he expected, it was supposed to start Jan. 1, Callaghan said the agency is ready to meet that commitment.

"We can do a much better job with permitting. I think things are going to be much better," Callaghan said in a news release.

In an interview this morning, he said meeting the commitment mainly required agency officials to reconsider how they handle the permits.

"I wouldn't say it was overly difficult, nor would I say it was easy..

.. No one had ever sat down to think about how long it should take to handle a permit," he said.

Bill Adams, general counsel for the DEP, said a key change is that the agency will no longer fill in the blanks for companies that submit incomplete applications.

"We've found that too often in the past DEP permit writers spend valuable time on resurrecting or rewriting bad applications. That should and will be the applicant's responsibility," he said.

In return for having to meet a higher submission standard, businesses will get a more predictable permitting process, Adams said.

They'll know within 48 hours how long the permit will take to process, and they'll get quicker approval or rejection than before, he said.

Callaghan said the new system includes permits handled by the mining, water quality, air quality, solid waste and hazardous waste sections of the agency. The DEP is also investing \$1.5 million to move from a paper permitting process to a fully electronic process by next January.

"I don't know all the little snags that may occur between now and then, but that's the goal," he said.

One effect of this is that businesses will be able to track their permit's progress online.

"If it's got 10 steps to go through, you can log in and find out which step it's on," Callaghan said.

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