
Permitting Process Survey

Submitted to:

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Executive Summary

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), contracted with ORC Macro, a professional research and consulting firm, to conduct a telephone survey of DEC permittees and permit consultants about their experiences with the permitting process from July 1, 2002, to June 30, 2003. The survey's objectives were to obtain accurate, baseline data about the experiences and perceptions of the DEC's permitting processes and to obtain other input that will inform the DEC about improving its processes and services to permittees.

The survey included questions dealing with reasonableness of regulations; process timeliness; staff customer service and coordination; and how Vermont's processes compare with those in other states. Surveyors solicited ideas for improvements at several points during the survey.

Telephone data collection occurred from September 17 to October 5, 2003, and interviews were completed with 851 respondents. Many of these respondents were willing to provide specific feedback, as evidenced by the 1,664 comments received. The number of contacts for some permit programs was very small, making it impossible to allow for analysis at the program level with reasonable confidence. Therefore, responses for all programs were combined for analysis. It should be noted that the analysis included in this report meets statistical precision standards and can be interpreted with confidence.

Major Findings

The majority of respondents did not go through the permitting process themselves. Those who did not were asked for their perceptions of several aspects of the permitting processes. About half of respondents (49%) had received permits prior to fiscal year 2003.

A significantly higher percentage of those who went through the process themselves rated it as excellent or very good as compared to those without first-hand knowledge.

More than 85% of respondents who had been through the process personally felt that the department staff with whom they dealt were courteous and helpful and that they were treated fairly by the department staff during the permitting process.

More than 80% of respondents who had been through the process personally found the application and instruction forms to be clear and understandable. A significantly higher percentage of those respondents who went through the process themselves thought the regulations were reasonable as compared to those who had someone go through the process on their behalf.

A majority of those with first hand-knowledge thought the level of public involvement was about right, while a significantly lower proportion of those without first-hand experience thought the same.

More than three-quarters of respondents experiencing the permitting process reported that the time it took to issue their permit did not cause them problems, while 22% reported that the timing did cause them problems.

Thirty-nine respondents indicated that they had obtained permits from more than one DEC permit program for a single project. Slightly more than half of these respondents rated the coordination between programs for their project as average or above; nearly one-quarter of these respondents rated inter-program coordination as poor.

Of those who serve as consultants in other states, slightly more than half responded that the permitting process is more difficult in Vermont compared to that in other states, while nearly 20% reported that Vermont's permit processes are easier than those elsewhere.

I. Introduction

Background and Purpose

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Environmental Assistance Division contracted with ORC Macro, a professional research and consulting firm, to conduct a survey of DEC permittees and permit consultants about their experiences with the permitting process. The objectives of the survey were two-fold: first, to obtain accurate, baseline data about the experiences and perceptions of the DEC by its permittee customers and, second, to obtain data that will inform the DEC about improving its processes and service to permittees.

For several years prior to 2003, DEC staff conducted a mail survey of permittees to collect permit processing experience data. Due to low response rates, survey results were unable to be reliably generalized to all permittees, and the DEC felt that the study methods did not support the full objectives of the survey. The telephone survey conducted by ORC Macro in 2003 was based on the original mail survey developed by the DEC. The survey was tailored to accommodate telephone administration and questions were added to obtain more detailed information from permittees.

This report outlines the objectives of the Permitting Process Survey, the methods used to conduct it, and study results. In addition, suggestions for future DEC permittee surveys are included.

The Report's Organization

- **Chapter I: Introduction:** provides a brief overview of the survey as well as background information. It also provides a summary of the report's organization.
- **Chapter II: Methodology:** discusses the methods, including the sampling strategy, used to conduct the Permitting Process Survey. It also discusses survey instrument development, programming, and administration.
- **Chapter III: Results:** presents the results of the survey as well as discussion of the findings. It presents the results in the form of graphs with relevant narrative.

II. Methodology

Sample Preparation

Participants for the DEC Permitting Process Survey were obtained from two sources. First, the DEC provided ORC Macro with a list of the permits issued by certain programs within the department between July 1, 2002, and June 30, 2003.¹ Each record on this list included contact information for the permit holder or permittee.² To facilitate data collection, ORC Macro organized this list so that each record represented one permittee (whether an individual or a business) with corresponding contact information and a list of the programs from which each permittee received permits during the study period. Second, the DEC provided ORC Macro with a list of professional consultants who have ongoing relationships with the DEC. In some cases, consultants on the list were already represented in the permittee list; duplicates were removed so that the same individual would not be contacted more than once.

Eighteen permit programs were included in the survey (a list of programs may be found in Appendix A). Permit programs that issue at least 15 permits annually were selected. Some survey questions asked specifically about experiences with these permit programs. In these cases, the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) program designed for the survey displayed the name of the program(s) with which each respondent had experience so that the telephone interviewer could administer program-specific questions.

Contact persons included homeowners, town officials, professional consultants, and employees of private companies. In some cases, more than one person was listed as the permittee. Telephone interviewers were trained to administer the survey to any listed contacts in order to maximize the chances of completing a survey with one of the named permittees.

Because the sample frame provided by the DEC included all members of the defined population, sampling error was minimal. ORC Macro's sampling statistician determined that 850 completed interviews would allow for analyses of survey results at the .05 level of significance if all permit programs were combined; a much greater number of completed interviews would be needed to reliably analyze data at the permit program level. Due to the small number of available contacts in some permit programs (less than 30), it was decided that precision levels for individual programs would be evaluated after data collection, and results would be reported at the program level only if they met minimal statistical precision criteria.

¹ Note that the permits represented in the Permitting Process Survey are entirely separate from Act 250 permits. The DEC Permitting Process Survey did not inquire about any experiences with Act 250 permits.

² Note that permits for which full contact information (name, address, and telephone number) was not available were excluded from the survey sample.

Survey Instrument

ORC Macro and the DEC worked together to adapt the DEC's mail survey into a longer and more detailed telephone survey. Once the survey instrument was finalized, ORC Macro programmed the survey for Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) using the Computers for Marketing (CfMC) Software. The CATI program included the following benefits:

- Automated skips and branches according to the survey instrument's logic
- Range and logic checks for respondents' answers
- Hard and soft edits for response categories
- Internal consistency checks for respondents' answers
- Programmed question rotation within a section to avoid question-order effects

Systematic testing of the programmed questionnaire is critical to ensuring reliable, accurate data. Therefore, after programming was completed, the questionnaire was subjected to a rigorous testing regime that included manual verification of all questions and response categories, and scenario testing.

The telephone survey consists of six sections, A-F. An example of the survey is provided in Appendix C.

Section A was administered to each contact in the sample. Each respondent was asked a set of core questions about how they prepared for the permitting process. At the request of the DEC, ORC Macro further screened the respondents to determine if any were acting as consultants for the permit in question.

Section B was administered only to those records for which the listed contact was the official permit holder, but was not the person who actually went through the permitting process. These permittees were asked specific questions that reflected their perceptions of the process, rather than their personal experience with it. In addition, they were asked several of the same questions that were asked of permittees who had been through the permitting experience personally.

Section C was administered to each permittee who went through the permitting process personally. This section was also administered to the consultant group reflecting broader experience with one or more permit programs. ORC Macro's telephone interviewers asked permittees questions about their experience with the permitting process. For permittees who held permits from more than one of the 18 permit programs, and consultants who dealt with more than one program, the same set of questions was asked in reference to each program from which a permit was received. These respondents are considered multiple program permit holders. (See Appendix A for a list of permit programs.)

In Section D, "multiple program permit holders" were asked whether they received permits from more than one permit program *for any single project* during the study period. If so, they were asked how well they thought different program staffs coordinated with each other during the permitting process.

In Section E, consultants (identified on the list provided by the DEC or through a screening question in Section A) were asked whether they worked as consultants in any other states. If so, they were asked whether permit processes were easier or more difficult in Vermont as compared to those in other states. They also were asked to specify why they thought these processes were easier or more difficult.

Finally, in Section F, all respondents were invited to share any additional feedback about their experiences with the DEC permitting process.

Data Collection

To lend legitimacy to the survey and to encourage participation, ORC Macro mailed a letter on official letterhead from the DEC's commissioner to each contact one week before telephone data collection began. A copy of the pre-notification letter appears in Appendix B.

On September 16, 2003, ORC Macro's project team and DEC staff conducted an interviewer training session. All survey interviewers who worked on the project were experienced ORC Macro CATI interviewers. Topics covered during the training included:

- Background and purpose of the study
- Question-by-question review of the survey instrument
- Study protocols

As part of the training session, interviewers practiced reading the CATI survey online and manipulating the screens as if they were completing a survey.

Following the interviewer training and practice sessions, ORC Macro conducted a live pre-test of the survey instrument. The sample for the pre-test was obtained by randomly selecting potential respondents from the contact list. ORC Macro project staff and a representative from the DEC listened to pre-test interviews and observed the CATI screens via ORC Macro's in-house monitoring system. ORC Macro and DEC staff determined that with one adjustment to the skip pattern, data collection could continue immediately.

Contact numbers were called both during regular business hours and in the evening to maximize the number of respondents contacted during the survey period. Telephone data collection occurred from September 17 to October 5, 2003, and interviews were completed with 851 respondents.

Data Analysis

Following data collection and data processing, descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were performed for each survey response. In consultation with the DEC, it was determined that sample size issues would not allow for analysis at the program level. Therefore, all program responses were combined for analysis.

To determine whether certain groups had different experiences with the permitting process, three sets of comparisons were performed for each survey question:

- Respondents who had experiences with more than one program (referred to as “multiple program permit holders”) were compared to those who received permits from only one program (referred to as “single program permit holders”).
- Respondents who received a DEC permit for the first time during the study period (referred to as “first-time permittees”) were compared to those who had received a permit from the DEC prior to July 1, 2002 (“experienced permittees”).
- Consultants were compared to non-consultants, where consultants were defined as any contact from the list of consultants provided by the DEC, or anyone who answered “yes” to the survey question: “Did you represent someone else in the survey process.”

In addition, certain questions were asked of both those who had gone through the permitting process themselves (in Section C) and those who had not (in Section B). Comparisons were performed between these groups for these questions.

Throughout the survey, open-ended questions were asked to allow respondents to provide other specific information. Responses were typed, as each interviewer understood them. Although most responses are essentially verbatim, abbreviations and paraphrasing have been used in some entries for clarity. Due to the broad range of responses to these questions, it was not possible to briefly summarize them. However, responses that appeared multiple times were combined to appear only once with the number of similar responses provided. The responses are listed in Appendix E. DEC has requested that responses be modified to remove program staff names. This only occurred in 30 of 1,660 total responses. Otherwise, these responses appear verbatim, and comment content has not been altered.

Survey Limitations

A challenge to the project during sample preparation and data collection was the quality of the contact information available for each permit record. A sizable number of permit records could not be included in the survey due to missing or incomplete contact information. As a result, the number of contacts for some permit programs was very small, making it impossible to complete enough surveys to allow for analysis at the program level with reasonable confidence. It should be noted that the analysis included in this report meet statistical precision standards and can be interpreted with confidence. Statistical confidence intervals are provided for each response.

ORC Macro has worked with the DEC to identify key information (such as the name of the person who actually experienced the permit process, regardless of official permittee name; and complete address and telephone information) that is critical to collect from permittees for future research efforts.

III. Results

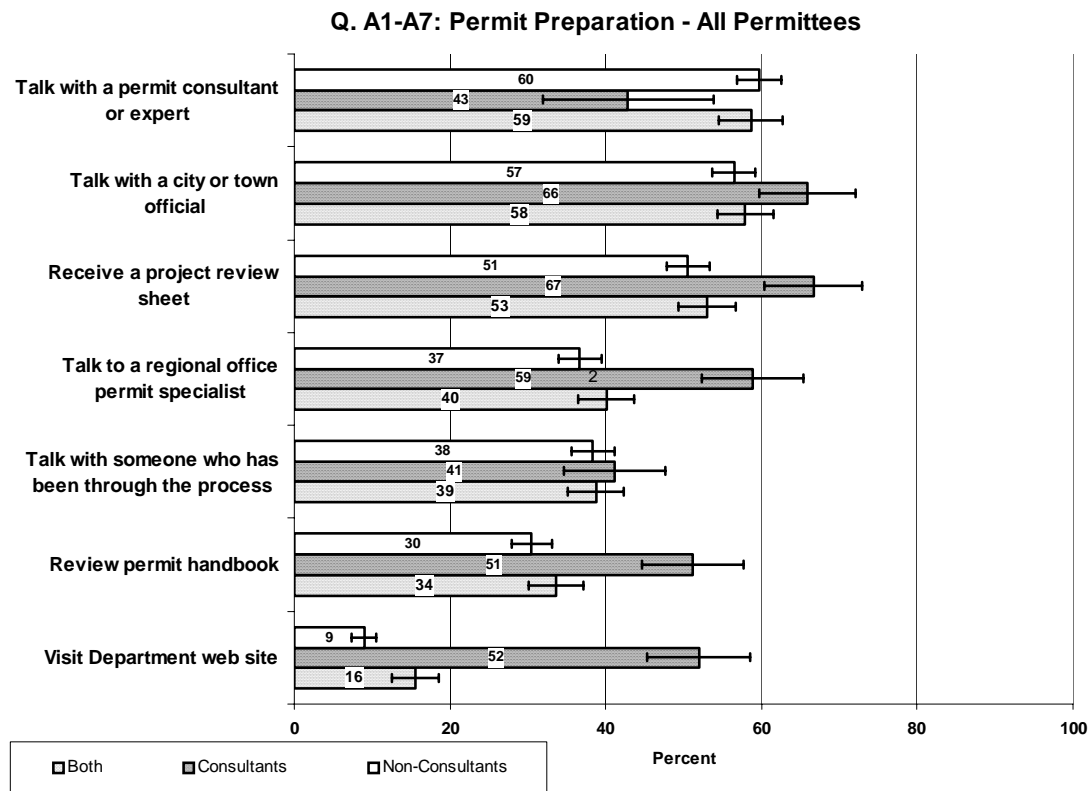
Section A: All Respondents

Following an introduction and confidentiality assurance, the survey began with a section of questions that were asked of all respondents. The intent of this section was to gather basic information about how permittees and consultants prepared for the permit process, the extent of their past experience with obtaining permits, and to determine whether they used the services of a consultant or were consultants themselves.

Preparing for the Permitting Process

Respondents were presented with several actions that may be taken to prepare for the permitting process, and asked whether or not they had taken each action. Respondents were then asked if they did anything else that was not mentioned to prepare for the permitting process.

The two actions most likely to be reported by respondents as preparation for the permitting process were talking with a permit consultant or expert (59%) and talking with a city or town official (58%). Furthermore, more than half of respondents (53%) received a project review sheet. Notably, 27% reported that they did not receive a project review sheet and 20% responded that they “did not know” whether they had received one or not.



Forty percent of respondents spoke with a regional office permit specialist and 39% spoke with a non-DEC staff member who had been through the process in preparation for the permitting process. Of those respondents who spoke with a regional office permit specialist, 75% did so prior to submitting their first application.

Approximately one-third (34%) of all respondents reported reviewing the Permit Handbook, while a relatively small percentage (16%) had visited the department's Web site in preparation for the permitting process.

Respondents were asked if they did anything else to prepare for the permitting process. About one-third (31%) of respondents provided other steps they took in preparation for the permitting process. A list of responses may be found in Appendix E.

Preparation by Consultants and Non-consultants

Comparing the preparation process of consultants and respondents who were not consultants (hereafter "non-consultants"), several significant differences were found. Consultants were significantly more likely than non-consultants to have reported receiving a project review sheet (67% vs. 51%), talked with a city or town official (66% vs. 57%), talked to a regional office permit specialist (59% vs. 37%), reviewed the permit handbook (51% vs. 30%), and visited the department's Web site (52% vs. 9%). Non-consultants, however, were significantly more likely to have talked with a permit consultant or expert (60% vs. 43%).

Notably, significantly more non-consultants (22%) reported "don't know" when asked if they had received a project review sheet, as compared to consultants (7%).

Preparation by Single and Multiple Program Permit Holders

Comparing single and multiple program permit holders also revealed significant differences in the permit preparation process. Multiple program permit holders were significantly more likely to have talked with a permit consultant or expert (83% vs. 57%), have received a project review sheet (75% vs. 51%), visited the department's Web site (47% vs. 12%), and to have reviewed the permit handbook (45% vs. 32%).

Preparation By First-Time and Experienced Permittees

Experienced permittees were significantly more likely to have taken certain steps in preparation for their permit(s) than were first-time permittees. Experienced permittees were more likely to have reviewed the Permit Handbook (37% vs. 30%), and to have visited the department's Web site (21% vs. 11%), whereas first-time permittees were significantly more likely to have talked with a city or town official (62% vs. 55%).

Notably, first-time permittees were significantly more likely than experienced permittees to respond "don't know" when asked if they had received a project review sheet (23% vs. 13%).

Prior Experience with the Permitting Process

Respondents were asked about their past experience obtaining permits from the department. Respondents were first asked whether they had ever received a permit from the department prior to July 1, 2002 (the current survey covers experiences obtaining permits *after* July 1, 2002). About half of respondents (49%) had received permits prior to fiscal year 2003. Of those who received permits in the past, slightly more than half had received five or fewer permits (53%), while slightly less than half had received more than five permits (46%).

Comparing consultants to non-consultants, consultants were significantly more likely (86%) to have received a permit prior to July 1, 2002, than non-consultants (43%). In addition, consultants were more likely than non-consultants to have received five or more permits in the past (80% vs. 33%).

Comparing single and multiple program permit holders, multiple program permit holders (82%) were significantly more likely to have received a permit prior to July 1, 2002, than single program permit holders (46%). Furthermore, multiple program permit holders were significantly more likely than single program permit holders to have received more than five permits in the past (81% vs. 40%).

At this point in the questionnaire, individuals identified as professional consultants by the department were routed to Section C, for questions about their experience with the permitting process.

Personal Experience in the Permitting Process

In order to identify which respondents had first-hand experience with the permitting process, respondents were asked if had gone through the permitting process themselves, or if someone else had represented them in the process. Only 38% of respondents went through the permitting process themselves. The majority of respondents (61%) was represented in the process by someone else.

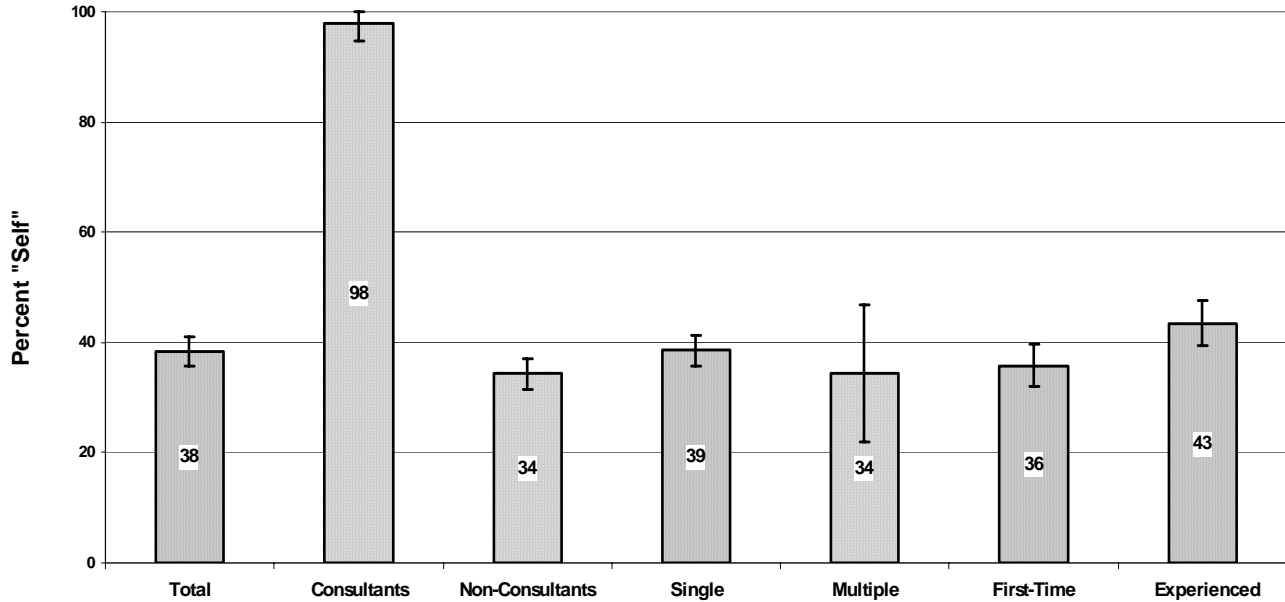
Not surprisingly, consultants were significantly more likely to have gone through the experience personally (98%), as compared to non-consultants (34%). No significant differences were found between single and multiple program permit holders, or between first-time and experienced permittees on this question.

Identifying Consultants

Respondents who went through the permitting process themselves (38% of all respondents) were asked whether they did so as a representative for someone else. Approximately 16% of these respondents reported that they had served as a representative for someone else. Of that 16%, 27% identified themselves as professional consultants. Respondents who reported that they had represented someone else in the permitting process (whether professional consultants or not) were flagged as “consultants” and combined with the professional consultants sample group provided by the department. This combined group was administered the consultant-specific

questions in Section D and used for the comparative analysis of consultants versus non-consultants.

Q. A10: Did you go through the process yourself, or did someone represent you? - "Self" Responses



Section B: Permittees Without Personal Experience in the Permitting Process Themselves

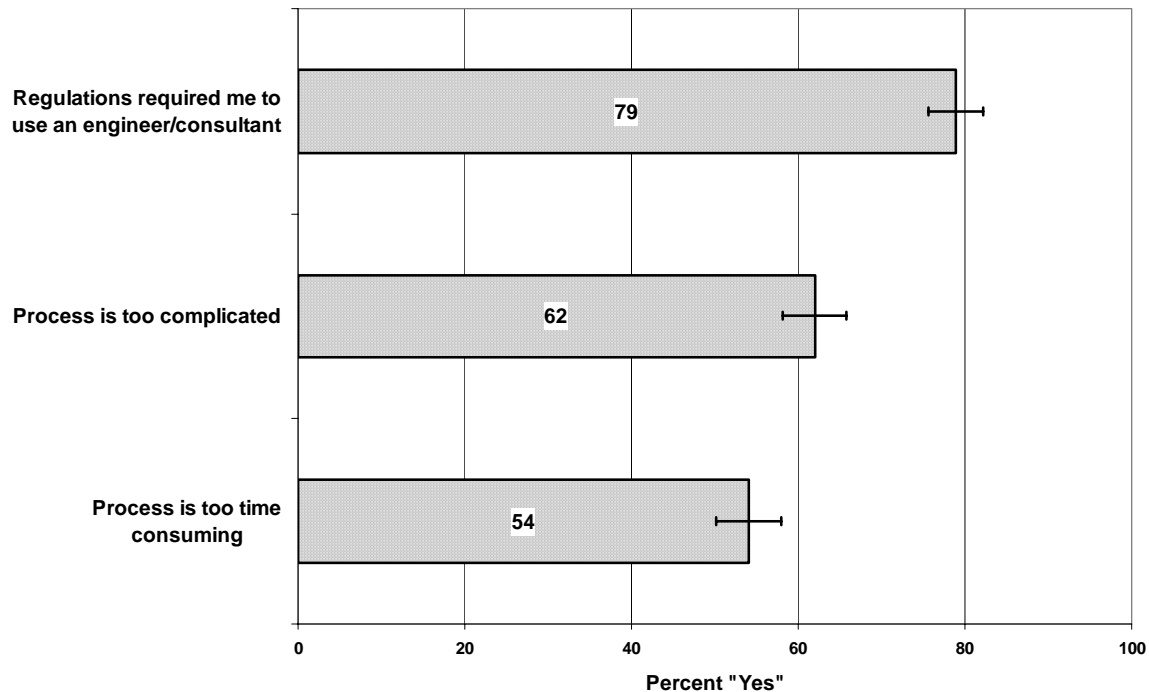
Section B of the questionnaire was designed to measure the opinions of people who held permits but who did not go through the permitting process themselves (i.e., the 61% of all respondents who reported that someone else represented them in the permitting process). It should be noted that consultants were not administered Section B and were instead routed directly to Section C.

Why Permittees Chose Not to Go Through the Process Themselves

The first four questions in Section B were intended to determine the reasons permittees chose not go through the permitting process themselves. Three possible reasons were presented to each permittee, and each reason was presented in a rotated order to avoid question-order effect:

- The regulations required use of an engineer/consultant
- The process is too complicated
- The process is too time consuming

Q. B12a-B12c: Reasons Permittees Chose Not to Go Through the Process



A slight majority (54%) thought the process would be too time consuming to go through themselves, while nearly two-thirds felt the process would be too complicated (62%). The strongest response was in the third category, for which 79% of permittees reported that they were required by the regulations to hire an engineer or consultant for some part of the process.

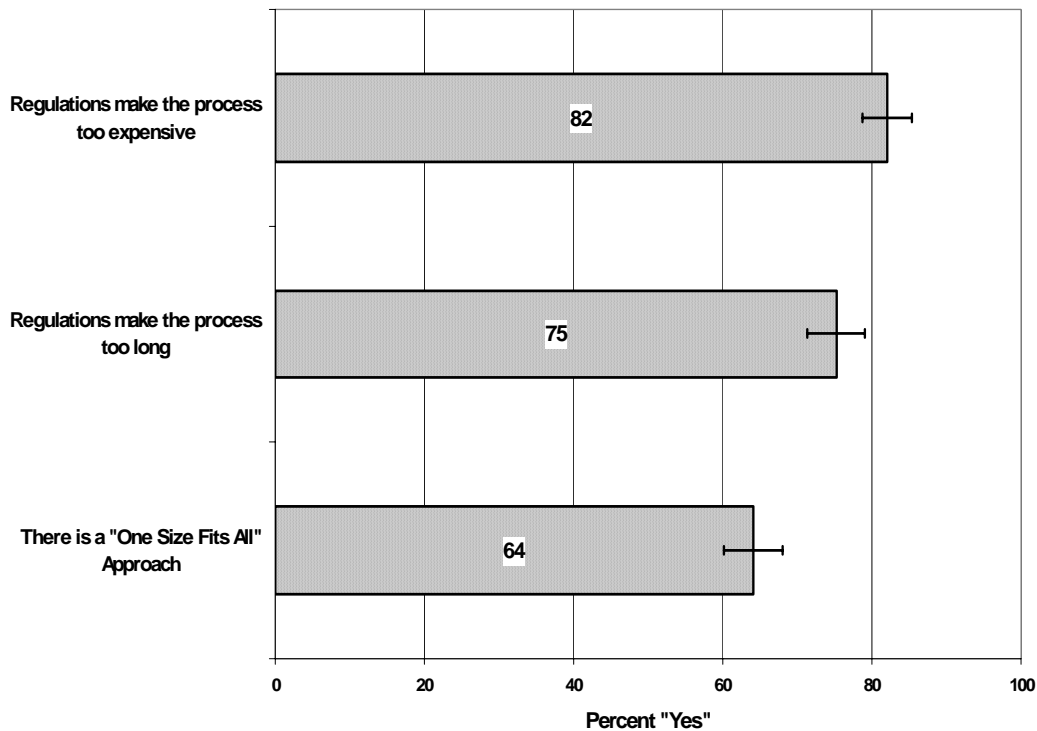
In addition, permittees were asked if there were any other reasons (not mentioned) why they chose not to go through the process. About two-thirds of the permittees in this group said that there was no other reason beyond those mentioned by the interviewer. A list of responses from those who did specify other reasons may be found in Appendix E.

Are Permitting Regulations Reasonable?

Permittees who did not go through the permitting process themselves were then asked four questions to determine their impressions of the reasonableness of the regulations. Based on their perception of the permitting process, a majority of permittees found the regulations reasonable (56%), while a third (35%) did not consider the regulations reasonable. Nine percent did not have an opinion on this question.

Those who did not find the regulations reasonable were again presented with three choices why they might consider the regulations unreasonable. Again, the reasons were presented in rotated order to reduce question-order effects. The responses are summarized in Fig. B13a-B13c below.

Q. B13a-B13c: Reasons the Permitting Regulations are Unreasonable



Permittees who felt that the regulations were unreasonable were asked if there were any other reasons (not yet mentioned) why they so. More than half (55%) provided other reasons with the most common response being that the process was too complicated, confusing, or daunting for a layperson to understand. A list of responses can be found in Appendix E.

Level of Public Involvement in the Permitting Process

Pursuant to permit laws and regulations, some permit programs provide an opportunity for the public to comment on permits during the review process, while others only allow for an appeal of the permitting decision. Permittees were asked whether they thought the level of public involvement for their particular permit program was reasonable.

Only 24% of permittees who did not go through the permitting process themselves thought the level of public involvement was too much, while 44% thought it was about right. A fairly small percentage (8%) thought there was too little public involvement. Nearly a quarter (24%) of permittees without personal experience in the process said they “didn’t know” whether the level of public involvement in the process was too much, about right, or too little.³

³ These data include responses from programs that have a public process and those that do not.

Overall Perception of Permittees Who Did Not Go Through the Process Themselves

Permittees who did not go through the process themselves were asked to rate their overall perception of the permitting process. Nearly 40% of permittees rated their overall opinion as “excellent” or “very good,” while 32% rated the process as average. The remaining 24% of permittees rated their opinion as “fair” or “poor.”

Finally, permittees who did not go through the process themselves were asked if there was anything the department could do to improve the process. A review of the responses shows that the most common suggestion was improve the timeliness of the process, followed closely by a desire to personalize or to individualize the process. In addition, many people commented that the process should be simplified or streamlined and changed so that laypersons can understand it. A listing of responses is included in Appendix E.

Responses in this section were compared between single and multiple program permit holders, as well as first-time and experienced permittees. The only significant difference noted in these comparative analyses was that single program permit holders were more likely than multiple program permit holders to respond that there were other reasons not mentioned by the interviewer that they chose not to go through the process themselves (66% vs. 43%).

Section C: Permittees with Personal Experience

Respondents who reported in Section A that they went through the permitting process themselves (as opposed to being represented by someone else) were asked a series of questions about their permitting experiences. For those respondents who received permits from multiple permit programs, the series of questions was repeated for each program. Respondents included both permittees and consultants. It is important to emphasize that the resultant program sample sizes do not allow comparisons between permit programs. However, interesting differences between consultants and non-consultants, experienced and first-time permittees, and single and multiple permit program holders are noted.

Types of Permits

Respondents were first asked whether any of the permits they had received within the program in question were new, amended, or renewed. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents reported that their permits were new, while 39% reported that their permits had been amended, and 30% said their permits had been renewed.

Consultants were more likely than non-consultants to have received new permits (86% vs. 60%) and amended permits (63% vs. 22%). However, consultants and non-consultants were equally likely to have received renewed permits (27% vs. 30%).

Similarly, multiple program permit holders were more likely than single program permit holders to have received new permits (83% vs. 66%) and amended permits (68% vs. 27%), but these groups were equally likely to have received permit renewals (27% and 33%, respectively).

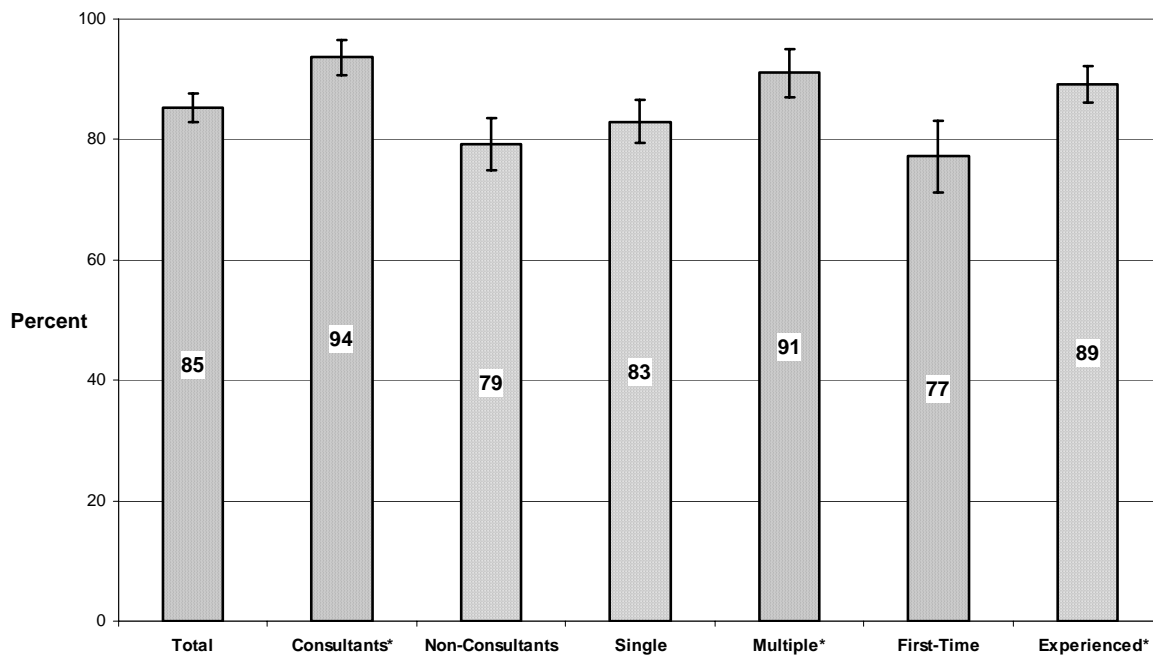
Experienced and first-time permittees were about equally likely to have received new permits between July 1, 2002, and June 30, 2003 (73% and 70%, respectively), but experienced permittees were more likely than first-time permittees to have received amended (49% vs. 21%) or renewed (36% vs. 12%) permits.

Understanding of Requirements by Those Experiencing the Permit Process

The DEC was interested to know whether these respondents knew what was required of them in the permitting process. Results show that a strong majority (85%) of respondents felt that they understood what they needed to know at the time they filed their permit application, whereas 13% said they did not understand what they needed to know. About 2% did not know if they understood what they needed to know at the time or not.

Not surprisingly, experienced respondents were significantly more likely than first-time respondents to report that they knew what they needed to do to prepare a complete application (89% vs. 77%), as were multiple program permit holders as compared to single program permit holders (91% vs. 83%), and consultants as compared to non-consultants (94% vs. 79%).

**Q. C18: Understood Requirements for a Complete Application?
"Yes" Responses**



*Significant Difference

Permittee Interaction with Department Staff

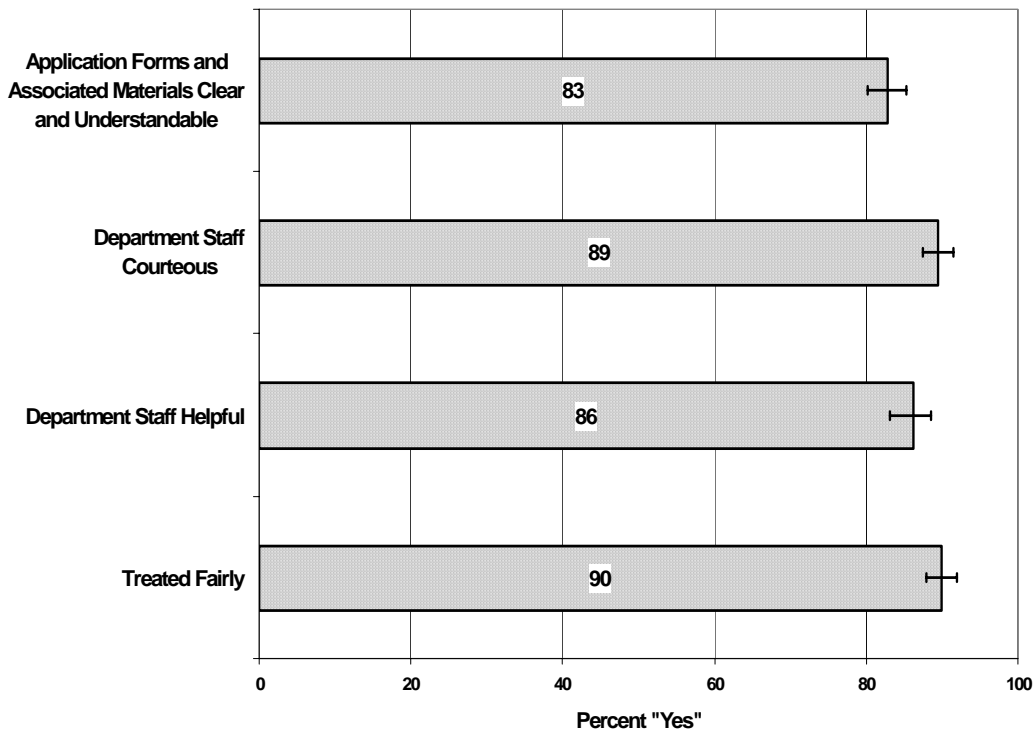
Most of these respondents interacted with department permit staff from the beginning of the process: Overall, more than three-quarters (77%) of respondents dealt directly with department permit program staff at the beginning of the application process, whereas 20% indicated that they had not dealt with staff. In addition, 3% did not know whether they had dealt with staff.

Multiple program permit holders (85%) and consultants (83%) were more likely than single program permit holders (74%) and non-consultants (72%) to deal directly with DEC staff at the beginning of the process. No significant difference was found between the percentages of first-time and experienced respondents who dealt with DEC staff at the beginning of the process.

Application Forms and Interactions with Staff

Overall, respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with the application form and department staff. More than 80% of respondents who had been through the process personally found the application forms and associated instruction forms to be clear and understandable; felt that department staff with whom they dealt were courteous and helpful; and felt that they were treated fairly by department staff during the permitting process.

Q. C20-C23: Application Forms and Interaction with Staff



These high marks were found across the board: no significant differences in these opinions were found between consultants and non-consultants, single and multiple program permit holders, or first-time and experienced respondents.

The permittees who reported that they were not treated fairly by department staff (6%) were asked why they thought they were treated unfairly. A variety of responses were provided (see Appendix E for a list), including confusion about the project, lack of communication, untimely processing, and staff inexperience.

Permit Processing Time

Next, respondents were asked about their experiences with the processing time for their permit. Seventy-two percent of respondents said they were informed of the likely processing time for their permits, while 18% said they were not, and 9% said they did not know. No differences were found among comparison groups.

Of those who were informed of the likely processing time, 41% reported that they were informed before submitting their application, 30% were informed after, 10% were not informed until they asked, and 16% did not know. More single program permit holders reported that they were informed of the likely processing time before submitting the application, as compared to multiple program permit holders (47% vs. 30%). Conversely, multiple program permit holders were more likely to have been informed after submitting the application (41% vs. 26%). While there were no significant differences between the percentages of consultants and non-consultants who were informed before submitting their application, consultants were more likely to be informed after submitting their application (39% vs. 25%). Finally, non-consultants (21%) were significantly more likely to report that they did not know, as compared to consultants (8%).

Those who were informed of the likely processing time (72% overall) were then asked if the time estimate was accurate. Of that group, 77% reported that the time estimate was accurate, while 10% reported that it was not, and 11% did not know. Consultants were more likely than non-consultants to report that the processing time estimate was accurate (84% vs. 73%).

These respondents were asked if the time it took to issue their permits caused them any problems. More than three-quarters of respondents reported that the time it took to issue their permit did not cause them problems, while 22% reported that timing caused them problems. No significant differences were found between comparison groups.

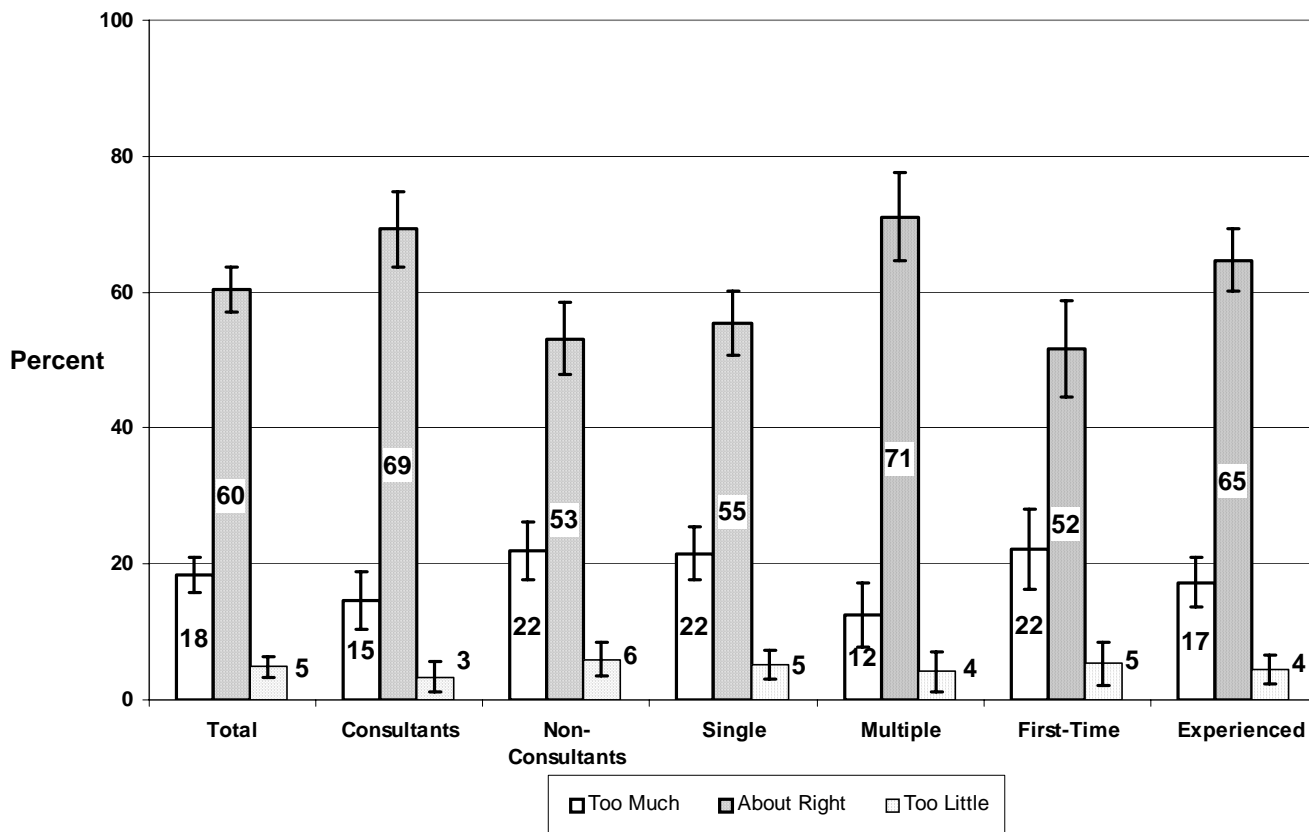
Those who reported that the processing time caused problems were asked to elaborate on the problems caused by the delay. Refer to Appendix E for a listing of responses. Most responses related to delays in the project and/or increased cost incurred because of the delay. Others reported increased frustration and aggravation because of the delay.

Level of Public Involvement

These respondents were asked whether they considered the level of public involvement in the permitting process for their permit program to be too much, about right, or too little. The permit programs include both those with and without a public involvement process as described earlier. Overall, 18% felt that there was too much public involvement. Single program permit holders were more likely than multiple program permit holders to feel that there was too much involvement (22% vs. 12%). Overall, 60% of respondents felt that it was about right. Experienced respondents were more likely than first-time permittees to feel that the public involvement was about right (67% vs. 52%), as were multiple program permit holders as compared to single program permit holders (71% vs. 55%). Overall, only 5% felt there was too

little public involvement in the permitting process, with no difference between comparison groups. Fifteen percent of respondents reported that they did not know.

Q. C26: Level of Public Involvement in the Permitting Process



Are Permitting Regulations Reasonable?

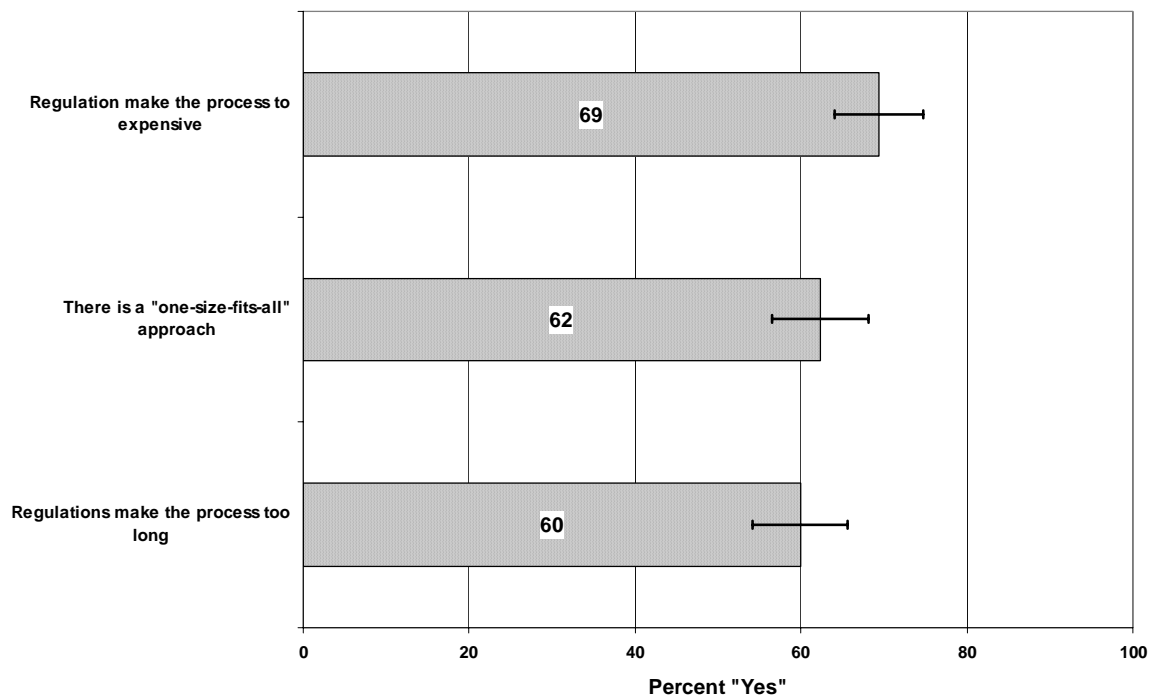
These respondents were also asked if, based on their knowledge of the permitting process, they thought the permitting regulations were reasonable. Overall, 71% of respondents felt they were reasonable, while 24% felt they were not, and 4% did not know. No significant differences were found among comparison groups.

Those respondents who felt that the regulations were unreasonable (24%) were presented with several reasons why they might consider permitting regulations unreasonable, including:

- The regulations are not individualized; there is a “one-size-fits-all” approach
- The regulations make the process too expensive
- The regulations make the process too lengthy

Nearly 60% of those who felt that the permitting regulations were unreasonable agreed with all of the reasons presented. Nearly 70% felt that the regulations make the process too expensive, while approximately 60% indicated that the remaining two reasons were equally important factors in making regulations unreasonable. No significant differences were found among comparison groups for these reasons.

Q. C27a-C27c: Reasons the Permitting Regulations are Unreasonable



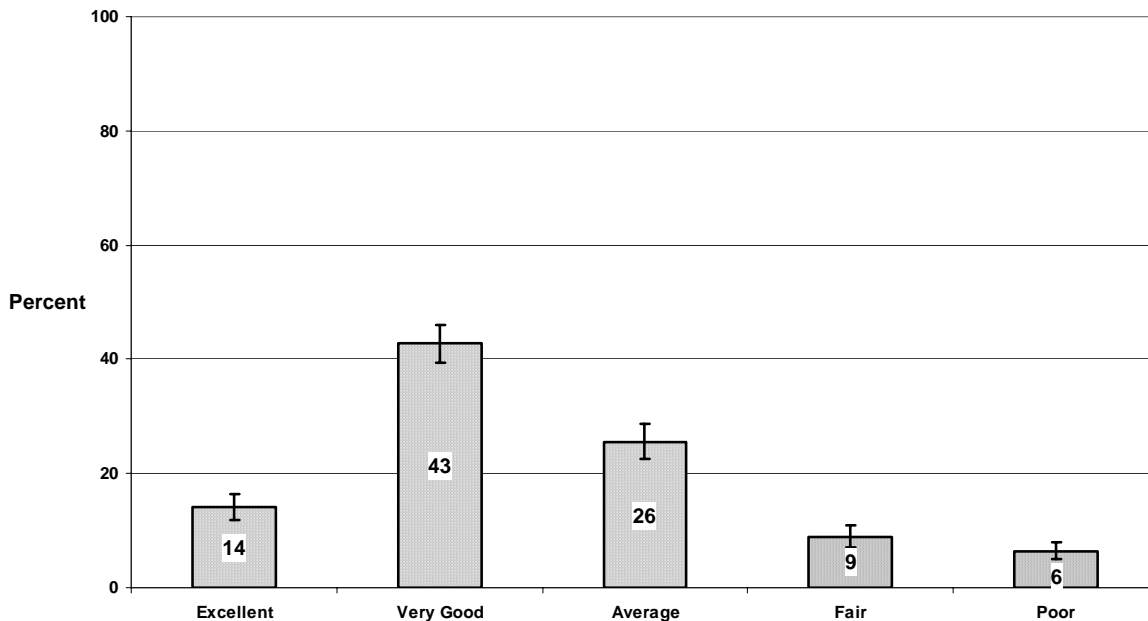
These respondents were asked if there were any other reasons (not mentioned) why they considered the permit regulations unreasonable. More than half (57%) reported additional reasons. Unlike permittees who did not go through the process themselves, those that went through the process were more likely to report specific problems or obstacles created by the regulations. A list of responses to this question is provided in Appendix E.

Overall Opinion of the Department

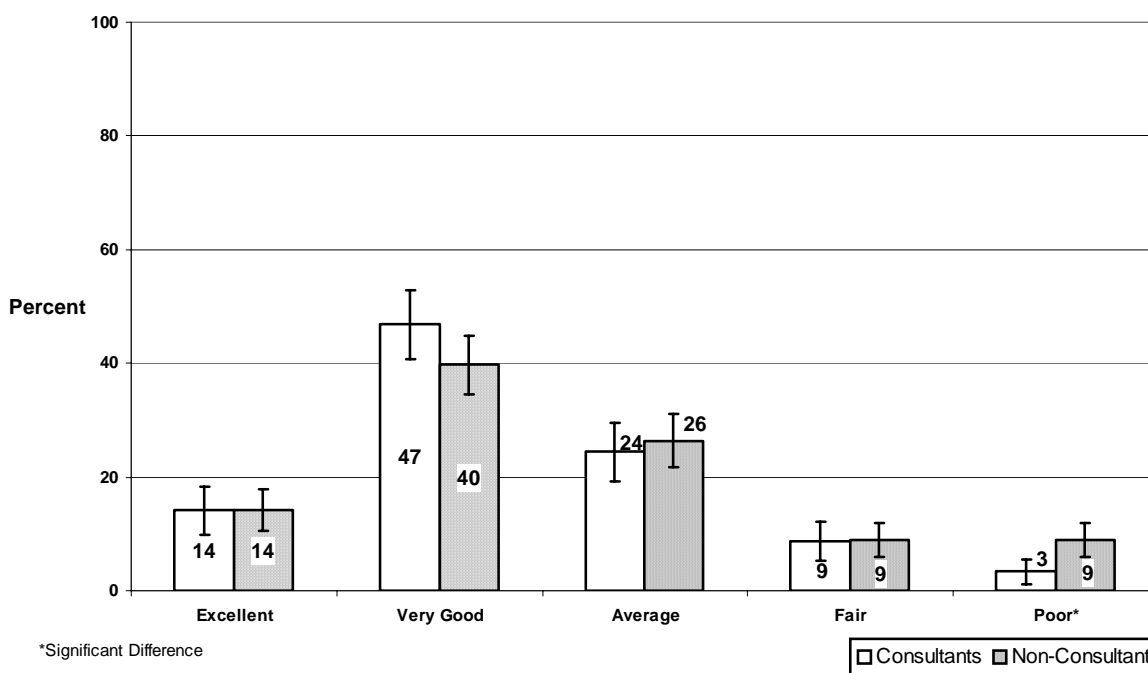
All respondents who went through the process themselves were asked for their overall opinion of the department’s permitting process on a five-point scale, from excellent to poor: 14% of respondents said their experience was excellent; 43% said it was very good; 26% said it was average; 9% said it was fair; and 6% said it was poor.

The only significant difference found between comparison groups was that non-consultants were more likely to rate their experience as poor (9%), as compared to consultants (3%).

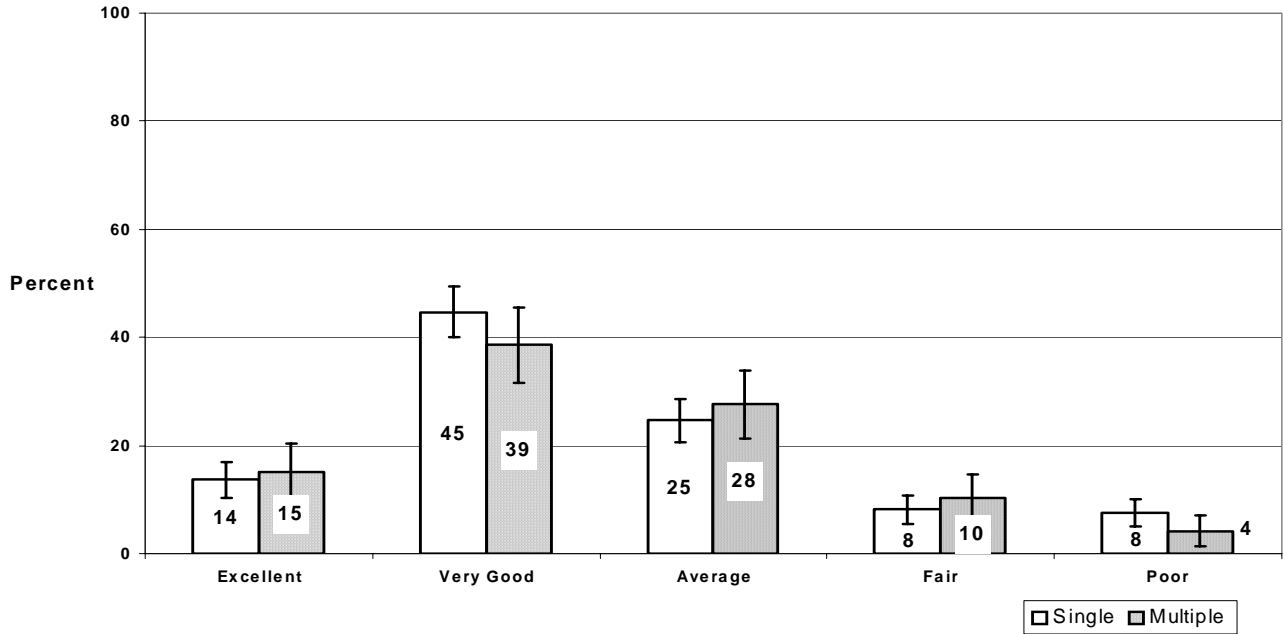
**Q. C28: Overall Opinion of the Permitting Process -
Permittees Who Went Through the Process**



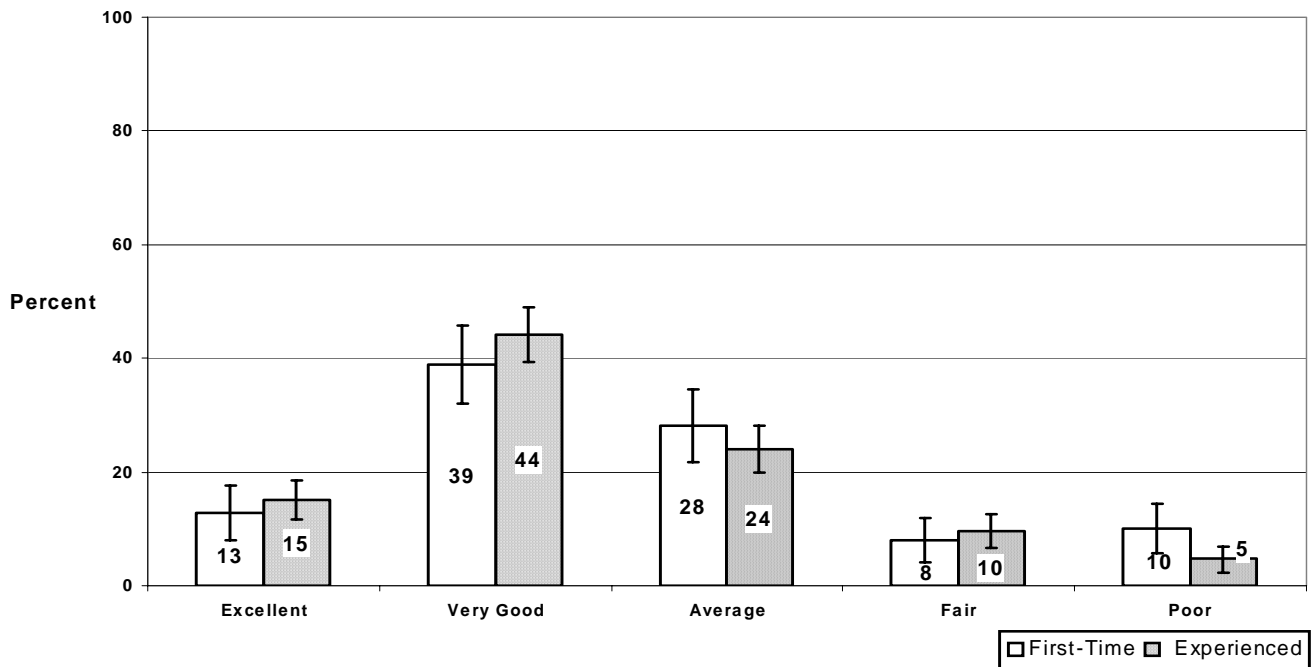
**Q. C28: Overall Opinion of the Permitting Process -
Consultants vs. Non-Consultants**



**Q. C28: Overall Opinion of the Permitting Process -
Single Permit Holder vs. Multiple Permit Holder**



**Q. C28: Overall Opinion of the Permitting Process -
First-Time vs. Experienced**

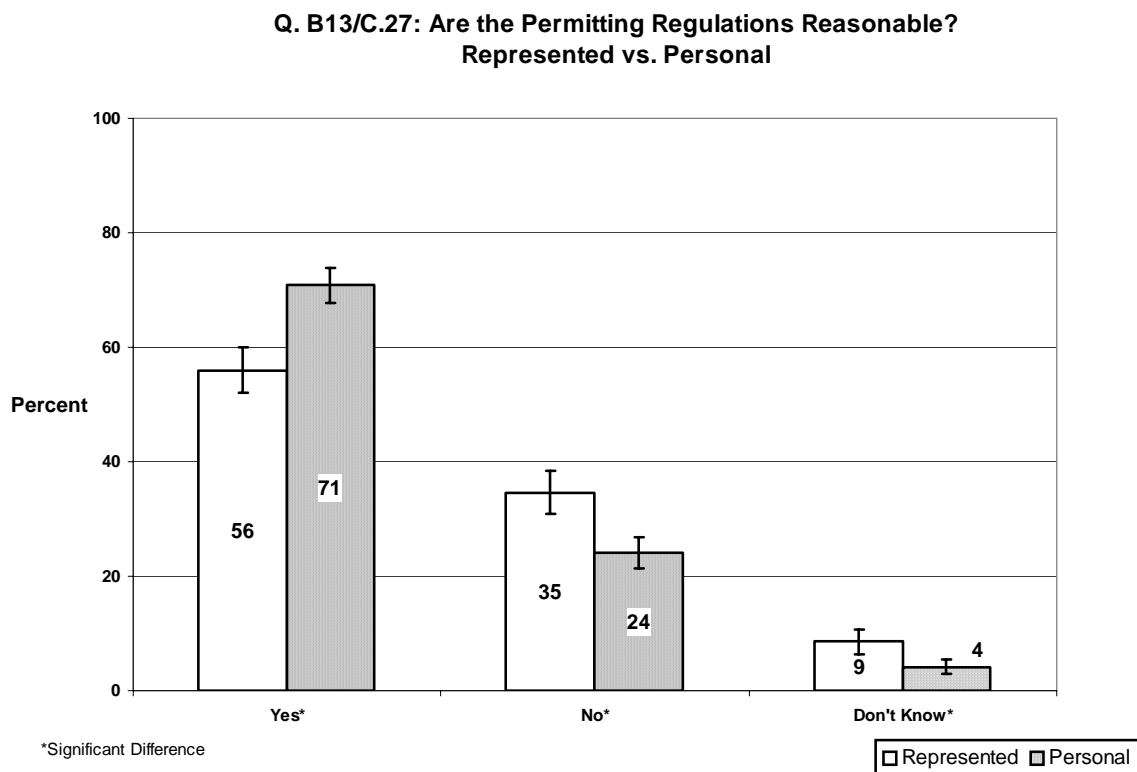


Suggestions for Improvement

Finally, respondents who went through the process themselves were asked how the department could improve the permitting process for the particular program they experienced. Similar to permittees who did not go through the process themselves, the most common comment related to reducing the amount of time it takes to obtain a permit. However, another very common response related to the workload of department staff. Many respondents commented that staff was overworked. Many of these permittees also felt that the process should be more individualized. A full list of comments appears in Appendix E.

Comparing Represented Permittees to Permittees or Consultants with Personal Experience

Section B of the questionnaire was designed to determine what those people who held permits, but who did not go through the permitting process themselves (referred to as “represented permittees”), thought of the process. Several of the questions asked in this section were also asked of those who did go through the process themselves (referred to as “permittees with personal experience”). The latter group included consultants who had experience with programs’ permitting processes. The DEC wanted to compare the perceptions of those who did not experience the process with the opinions of those who did.



All respondents were asked if they thought the permitting regulations were reasonable. A significantly higher percentage of those respondents who went through the process themselves

thought the regulations were reasonable (71%) as compared to those who did not go through the process (56%). As might be expected, a significantly higher proportion of those who did not have first-hand experience with the process said that they didn't know whether the regulations were reasonable or not (9% vs. 4%).

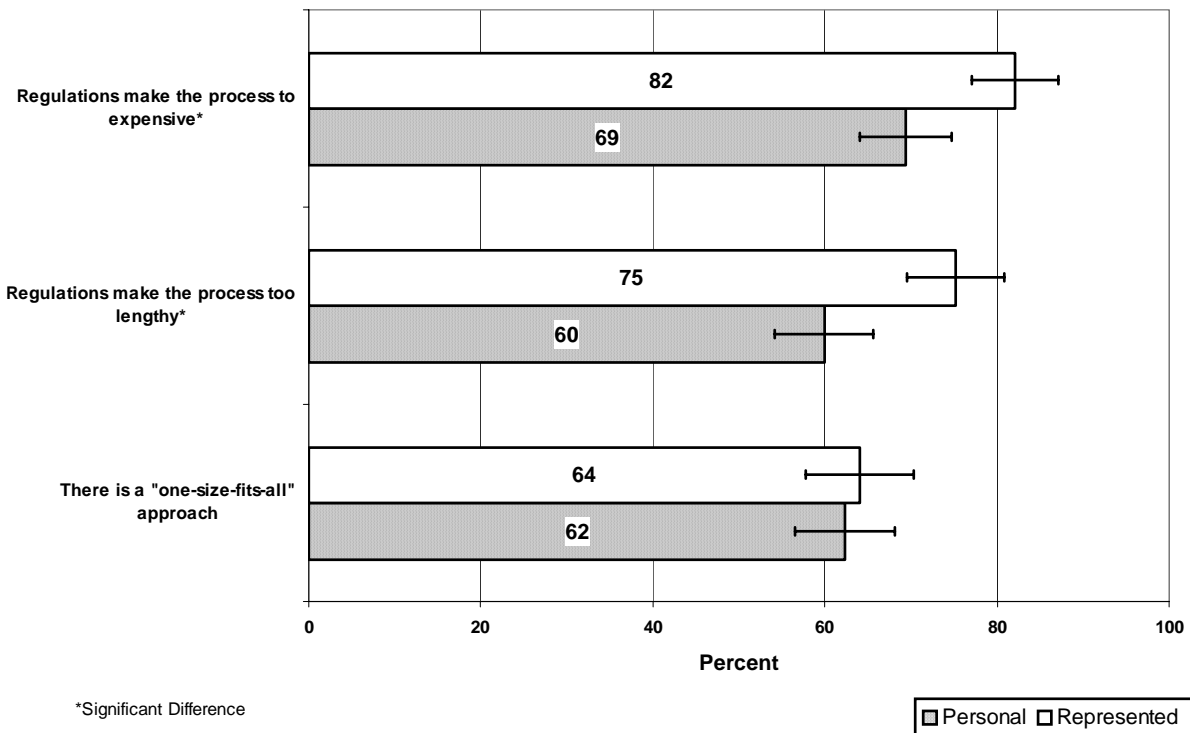
Those who said they thought the permitting regulations were unreasonable were presented with three possible reasons and were asked, for each reason, whether it reflected why they thought the regulations were unreasonable.

A significantly higher percentage of those who did not go through the process themselves felt that the regulations made the process too expensive. For both groups, this was the most highly rated reason why the regulations were unreasonable: 82% for those who did not go through the process and 69% for those who did.

Those who did not go through the process were also significantly more likely to report that the regulations make the process too lengthy and that that was the reason they found the regulations unreasonable, compared to those who did go through the process (75% vs. 60%).

There was no difference in the percentage of those who thought there was a one-size-fits-all approach to the regulations. A majority of both groups found this to be true: 64% for those who did not experience the process, and 62% for those who did.

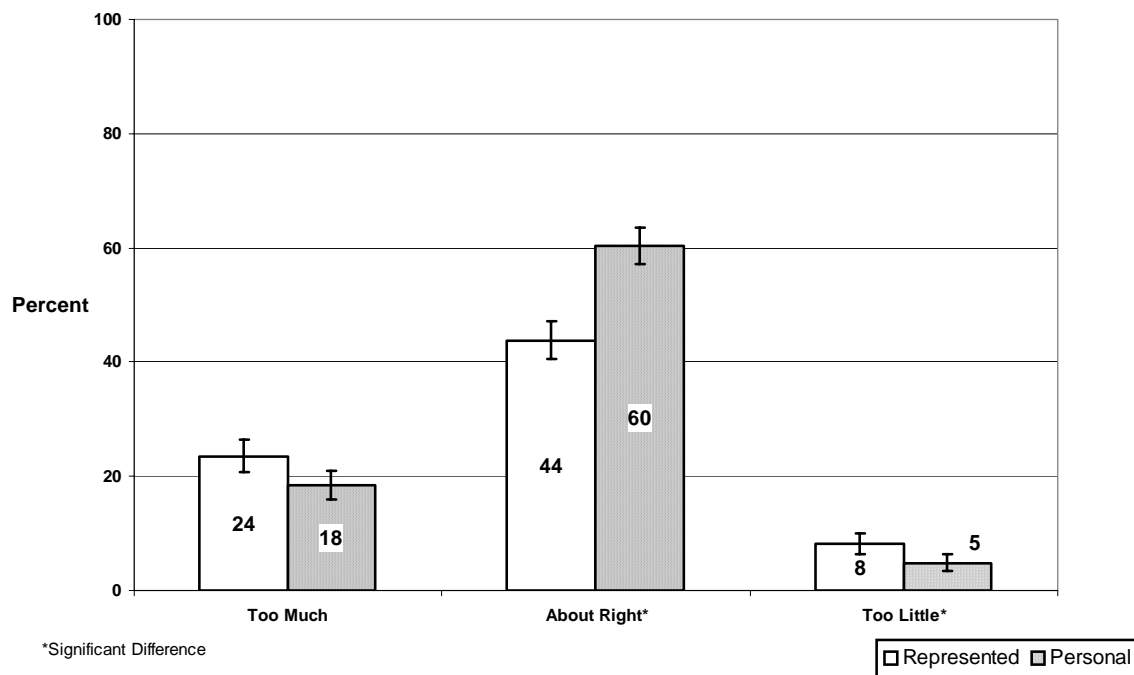
Q. B13a-c/ C27a-c: Reasons Regulations are Unreasonable Represented vs. Personal



All respondents were asked whether they thought the level of public involvement associated with their particular permit program was reasonable. Only 24% of those who did not go through the process, and 18% of those who did, thought the level of public involvement was too high. This was not a significant difference. A majority (60%) of those who went through the process themselves thought the level of public involvement was about right, while a significantly lower proportion (44%) of those without first-hand experience thought the same. A significantly smaller percentage of those with direct experience thought there was too little public involvement as compared to those who did not go through the process, although it should be noted that this was a very small percentage for both groups (5% and 8% respectively).

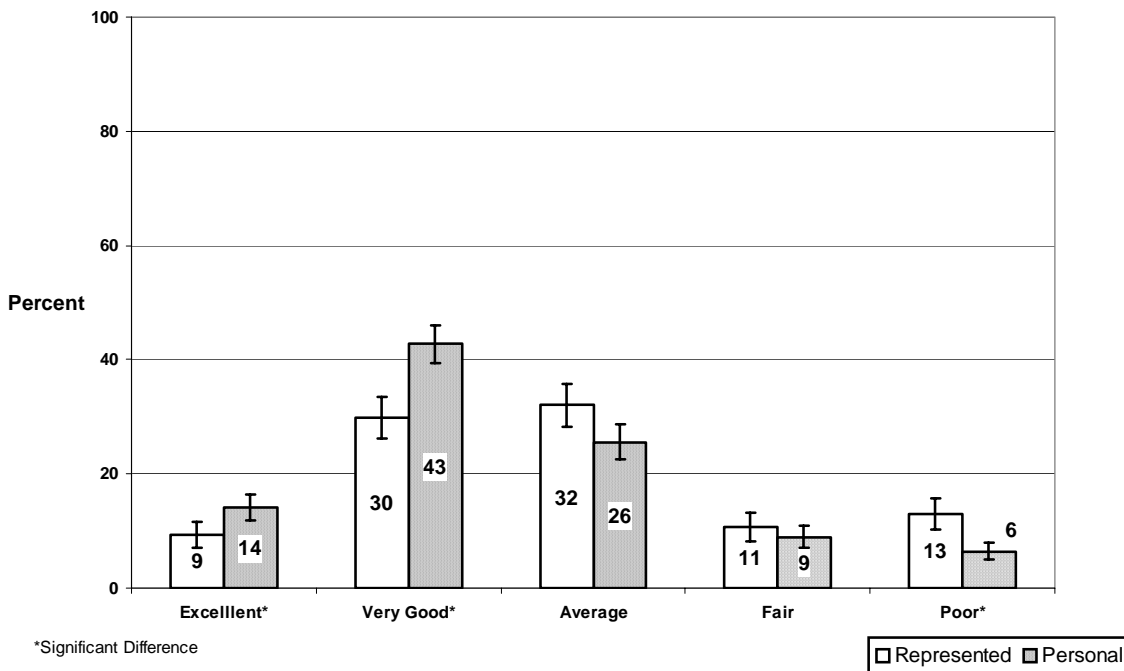
Again, it is not surprising to find that a significantly higher proportion (24%) of those without direct experience with the process said they “didn’t know” about the appropriateness of the level of public involvement than did those who went through the process personally (15%).

Q. B14/ C26: Level of Public Involvement in the Permitting Process Represented vs. Personal



Finally, respondents were asked to rate their overall opinion of the permitting process. A significantly higher percentage of those who went through the process themselves rated it as excellent or very good (14% and 43%, respectively) than those who did not go through the process personally (9% and 30% respectively). A significantly higher percentage of those who did not go through the process (13%) rated it as poor than did those who went through the process themselves (6%). Overall, of those who went through the permitting process, more rated the process as very good (43%) than all of the other categories, while those who did not go through the process rated the process as average (32%), more than any other category.

**Q. B15/C.28: Overall Opinion of the Permitting Process
Represented vs. Personal**



Section D: Permit Program Coordination

This section was administered only to those permittees who obtained permits from multiple permit programs, or consultants who worked with multiple permit programs. The purpose of this section was to obtain information about how well the 18 different permit programs coordinated with one another.

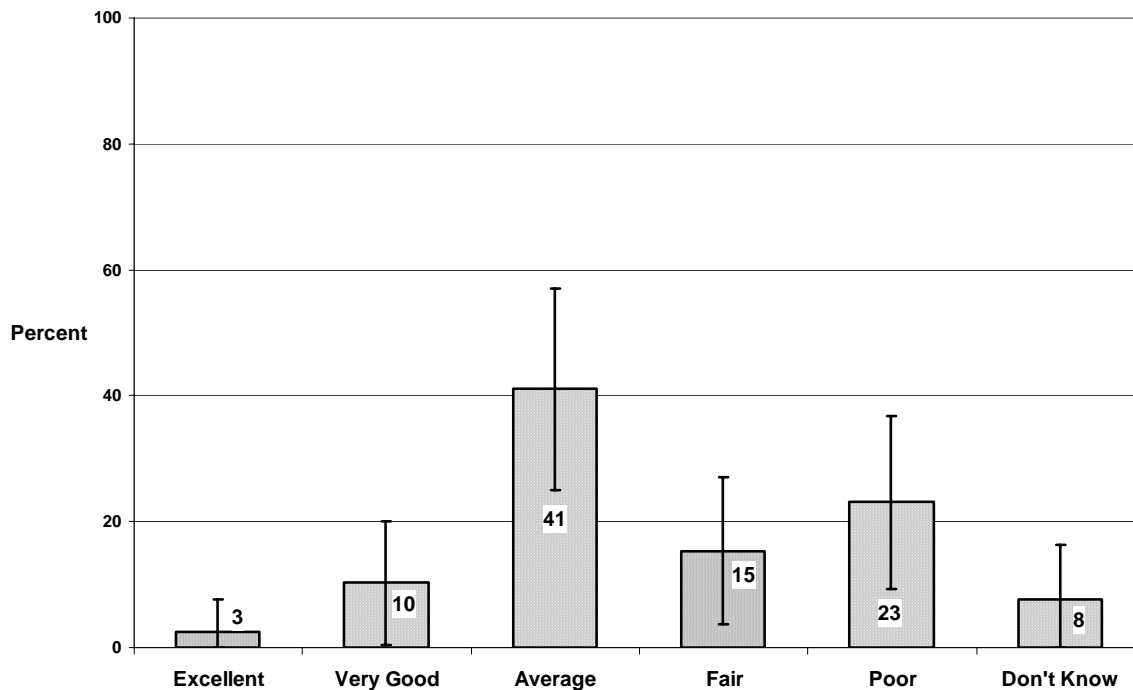
Coordination of Different Permit Programs

Multiple program permit holders were identified in the sample frame. By design, only those 54 respondents who were flagged as multiple program permit holders were administered Section D. Respondents directed to this section were asked if they obtained permits from more than one DEC permit program *for any single project* during the study period. Thirty-nine respondents (72%) indicated that they did obtain permits from more than one DEC permit program for a single project. These eligible respondents were asked how well the different permit program staff coordinated with each other.⁴

Three percent of the eligible respondents rated the coordination as excellent, while 10% rated it as very good. Slightly more than 40% rated the coordination as average, while 15% rated it as fair. Nearly one-quarter of eligible respondents rated inter-program coordination as poor.

⁴ Because of the relatively small number of respondents who met these criteria, the confidence intervals for these responses are larger than for most responses in the survey.

Q. D30a: Level of Coordination Between Program Staff



Section E: Vermont's Permitting Process as Compared to Other States'

Questions in this section were asked of consultants only. The intent of the section was to gather information about how many consultants served as an environmental permit consultant in other states. It also intended to provide insight into consultants' perceptions regarding permitting processes in Vermont as compared to those in other states.

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of consultants responded that they have served as consultants in another state.

Of those 40 consultants, 53% responded that the permitting process is more difficult in Vermont compared to those in the other state(s) where they serve as consultants, while 28% believed that it is about the same. Eighteen percent reported that Vermont's permit processes are easier than those in other states.

Both the group of consultants that find the Vermont permit process easier and the group that finds it more difficult were requested to specify the reasons for their opinion. A list of both sets of responses is provided in Appendix E.

Section F: Additional Comments for the DEC

The last section of the questionnaire is a closing section. It serves to capture any remaining information that the respondent would like to share that was not addressed in the other sections.

Relevant Information the DEC Should Know

All respondents, whether a single or multiple permit program holder, consultant or non-consultant, were asked if there was anything else they wished to share with the DEC about their permit processing experience. Of the 851 respondents, 31% indicated that they would like to share additional information and were given the opportunity to provide open-ended responses, in which the interviewers recorded the responses verbatim. A list of these responses is provided in Appendix E.