

Government amends Uniform Consent Guidelines under Air and Water Acts to Streamline Approvals, Reduce Delays and Strengthen Environmental Compliance

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The Government has amended the Uniform Consent Guidelines notified under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 to further streamline the consent mechanism for industries across all States and Union territories. The move is aimed at reducing procedural delays and strengthening environmental governance. The Guidelines issued last year provide a uniform framework for granting, refusing or cancelling Consent to Establish (CTE) and Consent to Operate (CTO). These guidelines ensure consistency, transparency and accountability in consent management across the country.

An important reform is the provision for Consolidated Consent and Authorisation. SPCBs can now process a common application and issue integrated permissions covering consents under the Air and Water Acts along with authorisations under various Waste Management Rules. Integrated consents reduce multiple applications, timelines for approvals are shortened, and strong provisions for monitoring, compliance and cancellation remain in place.

The amendments aim to ensure faster, clearer and more efficient approval processes while maintaining environmental safeguards, while supporting the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) and Pollution Control Committees (PCCs) in processing consent applications and conducting inspections. It also removes uncertainty and disruption in operations due to delays in renewal of Consent to Operate.

A major amendment relates to the validity of Consent to Operate (CTO). Under the amended guidelines, CTO, once granted, will remain valid until it is cancelled. Environmental compliance will continue to be enforced through periodic inspections and the consent can be cancelled in case of violations, if any noticed. This removes the need for repeated renewals, reduces paperwork, compliance burden on industries and ensures continuity of industrial operations. Further, the processing time for grant of consent to Red Category industries has been reduced from 120 days to 90 days.

To further speed up processing, the amended guidelines allow Registered Environmental Auditors, certified under the Environment Audit Rules, 2025, to conduct site visits and verify compliance, in addition to inspections by SPCB officers. This strengthens verification while enabling Boards to focus more on high-risk industries and enforcement.

Special provisions have been introduced for Micro and Small Enterprises located in notified industrial estates or areas. For such units, Consent to Establish is deemed granted upon submission of a self-certified application, as the land has already been assessed from an environmental perspective.

Further, the amended guidelines also replace rigid minimum-distance siting criteria with site-specific environmental assessment, allowing competent authorities to stipulate appropriate safeguards based on local facts and circumstances like proximity to water bodies, settlements, monuments and ecologically sensitive areas.

The amendments also allow States and Union territories to prescribe a one-time Consent to Operate fee for a period ranging from 5 to 25 years, reducing repetitive fee collection and administrative processing. A clear and uniform definition of ‘capital investment’ has been introduced in Schedule II to remove ambiguity in fee assessment and ensure consistency across States.

The amendments retain safeguards for refusal or cancellation of consent in cases of non-compliance with standards, violations of consent conditions, environmental damage, or location in prohibited areas. The revised framework balances ease of doing business with environmental protection through continuous monitoring, trust-based governance and a uniform national consent mechanism.

Control Guidelines under Air Act 1981

Consent Guidelines under Water Act 1974

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