E-Permitting: Assessing the State Experience

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ABSTRACT

Why aren't all environmental permits applied for, reviewed, and approved in one electronic system?

To find out, the Georgia EPD and US EPA are assessing states' use of electronic systems in air, water and waste permitting programs in a scoping study under the E-Enterprise initiative.

The study will identify a baseline of how states are planning for, or already implementing E-Permitting systems. The study will also describe the barriers to broader adoption of these systems across state environmental permitting programs.

E-Permitting in States - Background

- ECOS and EPA are partners in E-Enterprise for the Environment. Working together to:
  - Streamline and modernize environmental protection
  - Leverage technology where appropriate
  - Commit to joint governance to ensure adoptability

E-Permitting Workgroup

- 9 states and each of EPA's permitting program offices have formed a workgroup to study the state experience with E-Permitting:
    - GA, VA, DE, SC, MD, AR, IA, OR, OH
    - US EPA OW, OAR, OSWER, and OCFO

Establish a Baseline

- State survey conducted by GA describes the "as-is" conditions across the states.

- This is the first step to informing the desired "to-be" conditions.

- Enables us to understand the technical, financial, or regulatory barriers to broader use of E-Permitting systems.
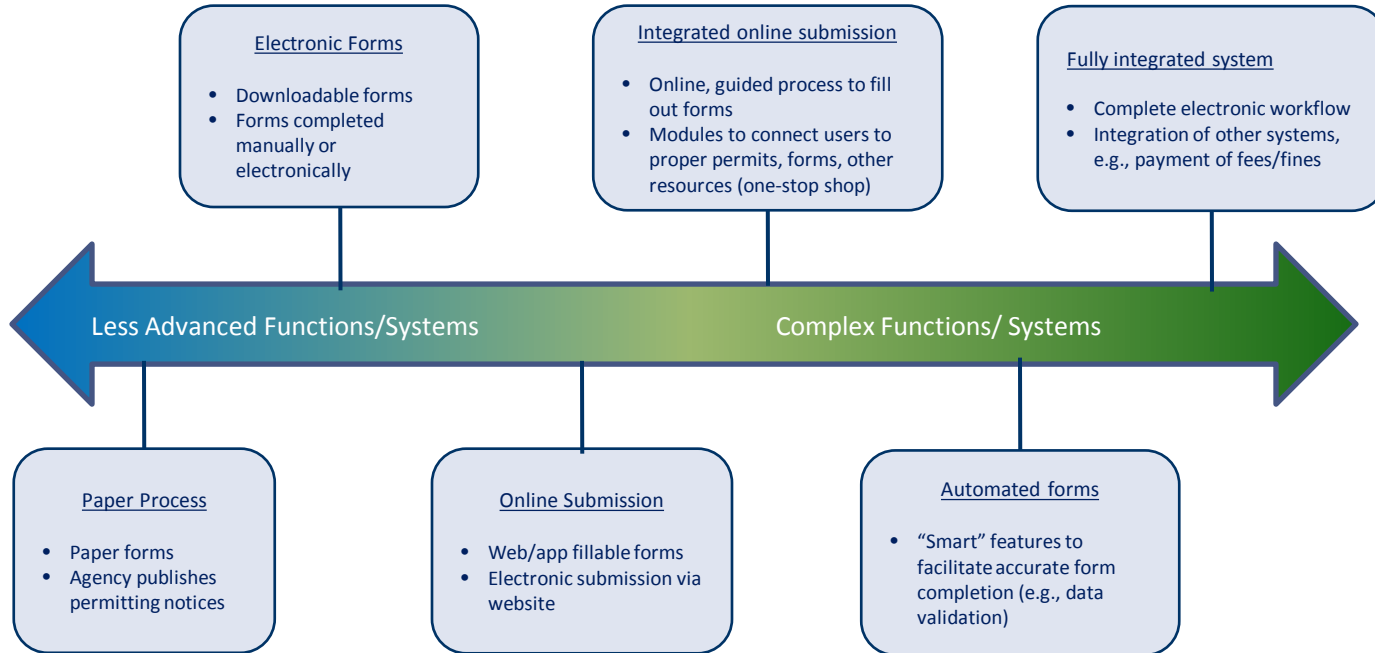
Establish a Baseline

- Specific topic areas included:
  - Current e-Permitting efforts;
  - Planned/Actual implementation of E-Permitting in the near future;
  - Barriers to implementing E-Permitting;
  - Realized and anticipated savings from e-Permitting.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents
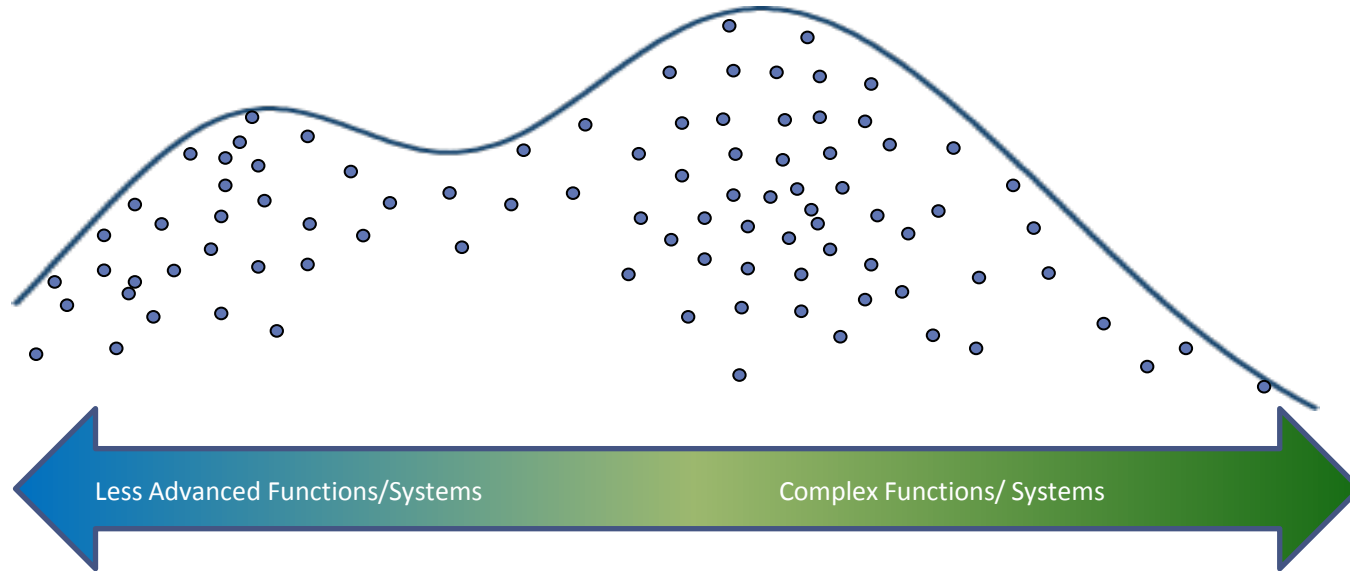
- 59 responses:

  - 35 Unique states

  - 23 Agency-wide responses

  - 32 Water programs

  - 26 Air programs

  - 25 NPDES-specific programs

  - 20 Waste programs

  - Other programs or reports, such as discharge reporting, etc.

Gradient of E-Permitting Efforts

Electronic Forms

- Downloadable forms
- Forms completed manually or electronically

Integrated online submission

- Online, guided process to fill out forms
- Modules to connect users to proper permits, forms, other resources (one-stop shop)

Fully integrated system

- Complete electronic workflow
- Integration of other systems, e.g., payment of fees/fines

Less Advanced Functions/Systems ⟷ Complex Functions/ Systems

Paper Process

- Paper forms
- Agency publishes permitting notices

Online Submission

- Web/app fillable forms
- Electronic submission via website

Automated forms

- "Smart" features to facilitate accurate form completion (e.g., data validation)

Respondents' Current E-Permitting Efforts

Less Advanced Functions/Systems

Complex Functions/ Systems

- 89 percent have at least some downloadable forms

- 33 percent have a workflow system and more

Note: Each response represented separately; may include more than one per state.
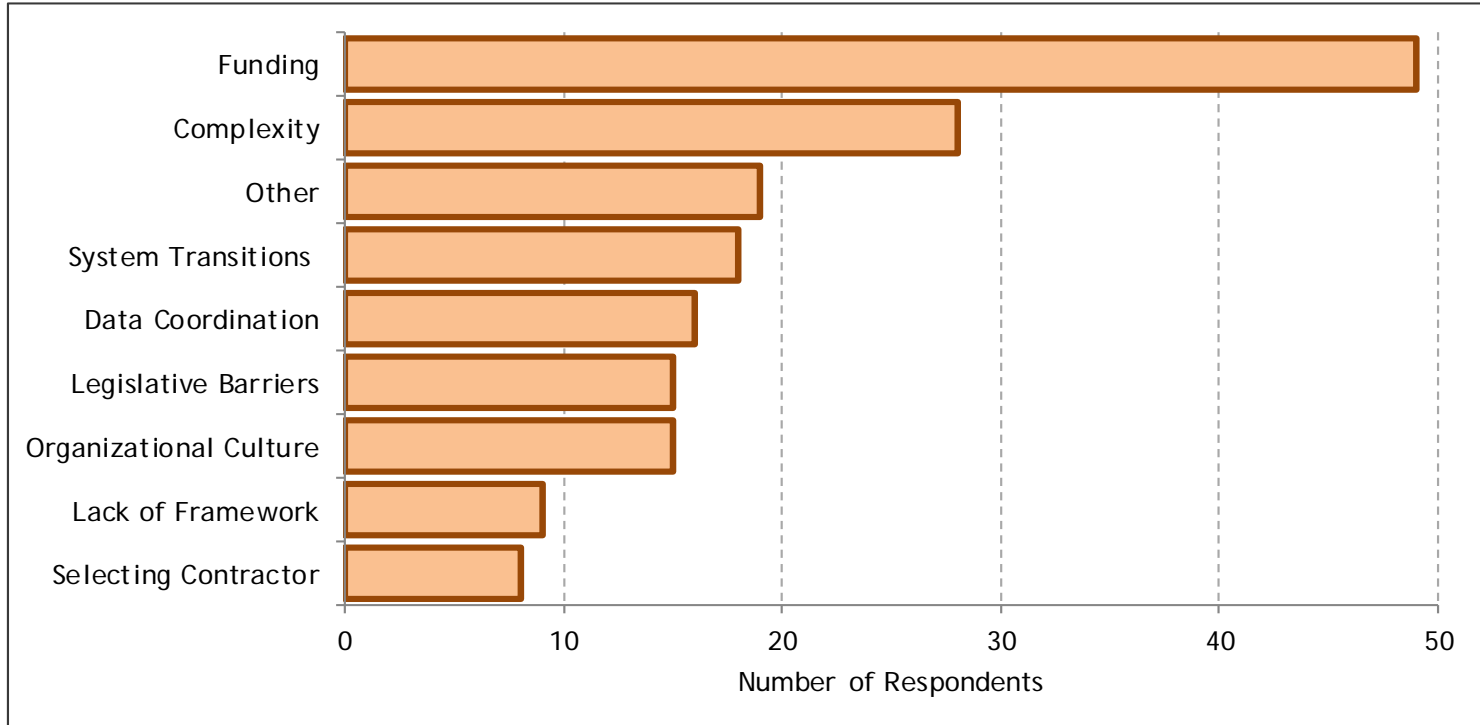
Respondents' Current E-Permitting Efforts

- Majority of responses: Water and Air program permits

- 70% of current systems implemented by both State & Vendor

  - Vendor costs range from $50k to $3.5M

- 57% used a combination of COTS and customized software to build E-Permitting system

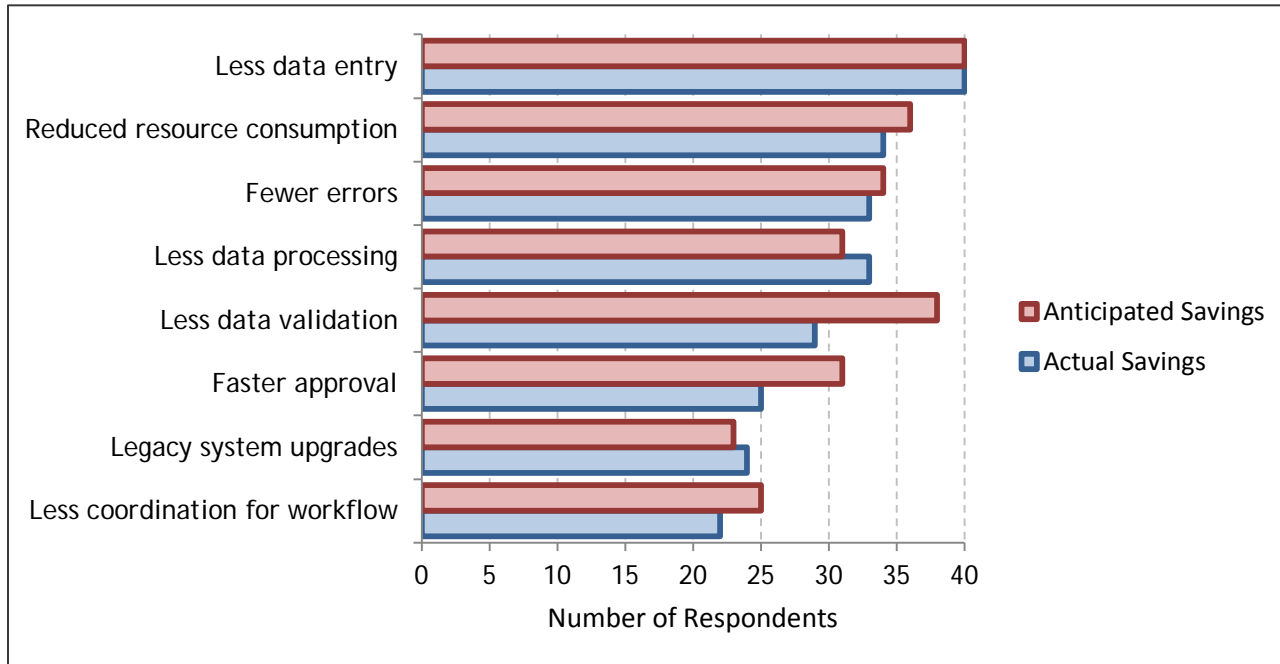- Development/implementation periods range from 10 hours to 10+ years

E-Permitting Implementation Goals

- Most common future enhancements
  - Integrated Payment Systems
  - Workflow Systems
  - Web/App Fillable Forms
  - One stop shop for linked forms

E-Permitting and Barriers

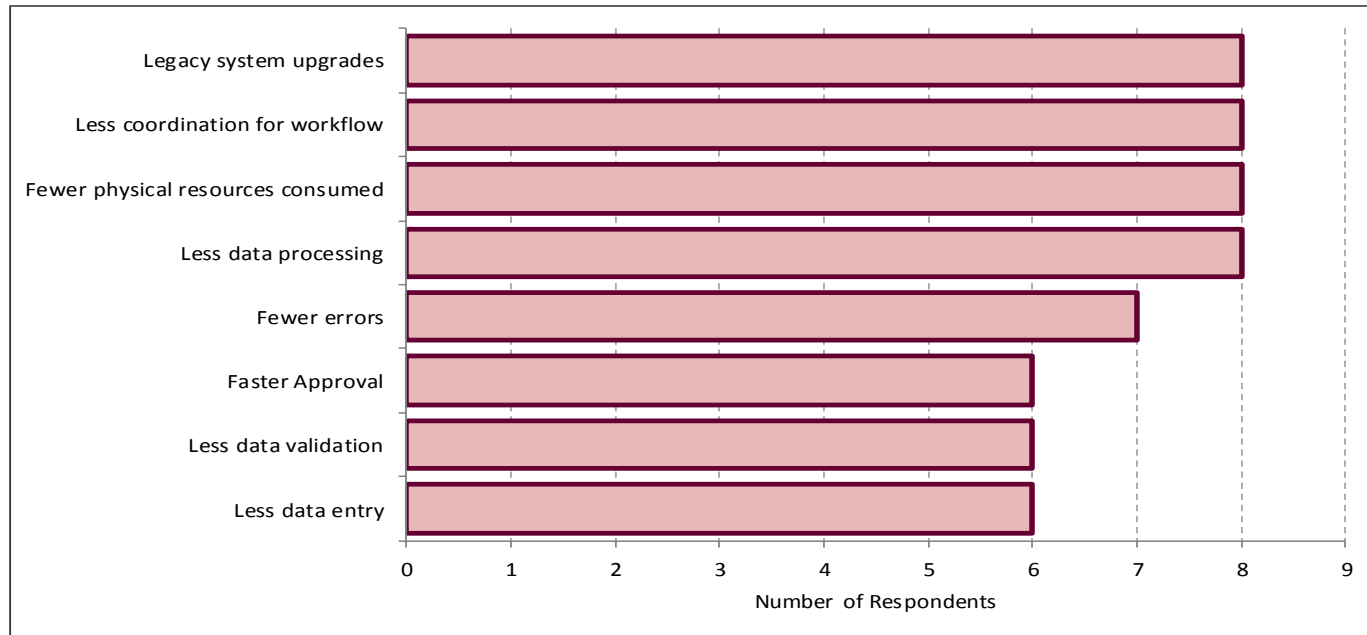# Actual vs Anticipated Savings from E-Permitting

Realized Savings from Existing E-Permitting Functions

- Enhanced compliance and enforcement
- Freeing up of resources, i.e., staff time and capital
- Improved transparency and data management
- One respondent - Up to <u>4 FTE</u> salary savings
- Another respondent - Up to <u>50 percent reduction</u> in paper use

Anticipated Savings from E-Permitting

- Nine respondents that have not yet realized any savings but anticipate a variety in the future

- e-Permitting expected to bring savings across many categories

Next Steps

- Share survey results so states can learn from experiences reported by others

- Examine Iowa's concept for permitting system framework and compare to findings in survey

- Identify data needs to develop robust return on investment analysis for ePermitting