

Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program Standard Operating Procedure

## Quality Assurance Policy- and Decision-Making

December 12, 2008

Finalized and Approved by the SWAMP Roundtable on 12/12/08

Approved by Beverly H. van Buuren, SWAMP QA Officer, on 12/12/08

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### 1. Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) describes the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) decision-making process for quality assurance (QA) policy. Documenting a plan for these policy decisions allows for the most effective use of resources and encourages coherent decisions that support SWAMP program goals. This SOP classifies the types of QA decisions by significance and defines the roles of the involved parties.

### 2. Responsibilities

The SWAMP QA Team (QAT), SWAMP Coordinator, and SWAMP Round Table (RT) are collectively responsible for making decisions for the SWAMP QA program, and the type of decision determines the involvement of each party. Three levels of decision are identified below as a means of defining the significance of the decision and responsibilities of those required to participate in the decision-making process:

#### ***2.1 Responsibility for Technical Decisions***

Technical decisions are everyday decisions, whose impact is immediate, and are made directly by the QAT. These decisions are set out clearly in policy manuals, such as the SWAMP Quality Assurance Program Plan (QAPrP) or SWAMP SOPs.

#### ***2.2 Responsibility for Operational Decisions***

Operational decisions have more significant consequences than technical decisions and the impact tends to be medium in range. These decisions may use moderate QA resources ( $\leq 80$  labor hours) or relate to a time sensitive issue. These decisions are not clearly set in SWAMP policy manuals. Operational decisions are made by the SWAMP Coordinator and QAT via open discussion, e-mail, and/or memorandum.

### ***2.3 Responsibility for Policy Decisions***

Policy decisions involve the overall intentions and direction of SWAMP QA program. These are strategic decisions that concern the long-term goals and values of the program. Policy decisions are the most important decision type and may use significant QA resources (> 80 labor hours). These decisions require open discussion with the SWAMP Round Table and cannot be made exclusively by the SWAMP Coordinator and/or QAT.

## **3. Procedure**

### ***3.1 Policy- and Decision-Making***

Policy decisions are the most important type of decision because they provide guidelines and goals for all other QA decisions. Consequently, it is necessary to clearly define the decision-making process, in order to ensure that they are made in a proactive, consistent, and efficient manner. This allows for a strategic course of action that supports the overarching program goals.

These decisions may address existing QA guidelines, a policy change, or a new policy and may arise from concerns of SWAMP program participants (Regional Water Quality Control Board [Regional Board], State Board Water Quality Control Board [State Board], QAT, and the SWAMP Data Management Team [DMT] members), and stakeholders. When such a policy decision must be made the following steps are followed:

- The QAT researches options regarding the policy issue.
- The QAT provides the research results to the SWAMP Coordinator with a recommendation for action.
- The SWAMP Coordinator puts the issue on the RT meeting agenda or requests the QAT to issue a memorandum to RT participants.
- Either via e-mail, phone discussion, or open discussion the RT provides input and comes to a consensus.

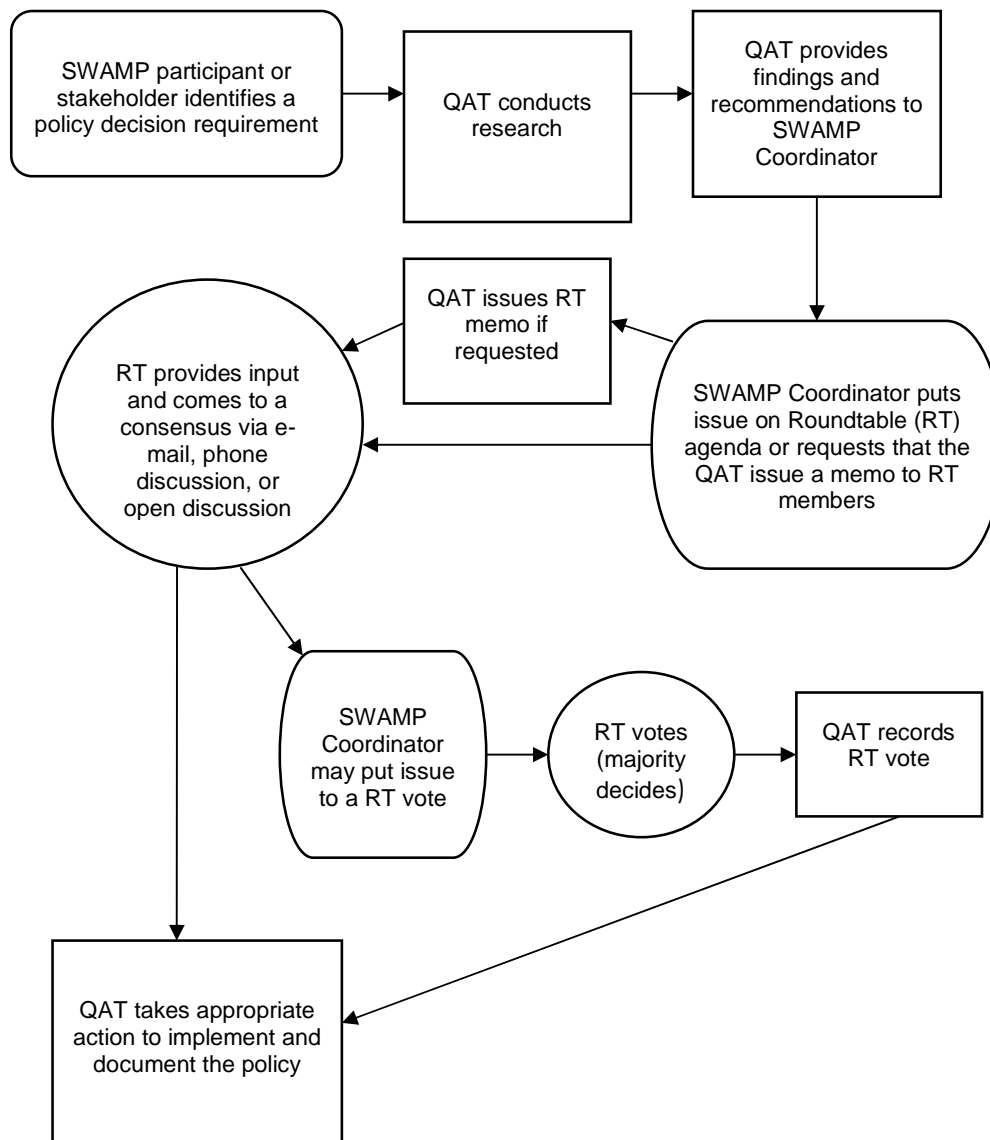
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- At the discretion of the SWAMP Coordinator, voting members of the RT may be asked to vote on the decision. The SWAMP RT approval is defined by majority vote. Each of the nine Regional Water Boards has one vote and the State Board has one vote, for a total of 10 votes. The QAT records the vote.
- The QAT takes the appropriate action to implement and document the policy.

Figure 1: Quality Assurance Policy- and Decision-Making Process



### **3.2 Documentation**

SWAMP QA policy decisions are documented by the QAT. This may include documentation in the Quality Assurance Program Plan (QAPrP) via addendums or revision and/or appropriate SOPs. These documents benefit the SWAMP program by providing a framework for consistent and efficient implementation of the policy.

### **3.3 External Decisions**

Some decisions may have implications beyond the SWAMP program and SWAMP comparability. Such decisions that are deemed outside the scope of SWAMP by the SWAMP RT and SWAMP Coordinator are brought to the State Board for decision. These items should be brought to the State Board by memorandum by an elected delegate from the RT, SWAMP Coordinator, or QAT. The State Board's decision is provided in a written format and issued to the RT.

## **4. References**

*Guidance for Preparing Standard Operating Procedures*; EPA QA/G-6; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 2001.

Puckett, M. *Quality Assurance Management Plan for the State of California's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program*; California Department of Fish and Game, Monterey, CA, 2002.

*Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program Quality Assurance Program Plan*; Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, Moss Landing, CA, 2008.