

AGRICULTURAL USE PROTECTION POLICY¹ (Chapter 1, Section 20)

I. Purpose

All surface waters in Wyoming are protected to some extent for agricultural uses. “Agricultural uses” are described in Chapter 1, Section 3 as being either stock watering or irrigation. The standard that applies to the protection of these uses is contained in Chapter 1, Section 20 which states:

*Section 20. **Agricultural Water Supply.** All Wyoming surface waters which have the natural water quality potential for use as an agricultural water supply shall be maintained at a quality which allows continued use of such waters for agricultural purposes.*

Degradation of such waters shall not be of such an extent to cause a measurable decrease in crop or livestock production.

Unless otherwise demonstrated, all Wyoming surface waters have the natural water quality potential for use as an agricultural water supply.

All water quality standards are established for two reasons. The first is to provide a benchmark against which a determination can be made as to whether a waterbody is impaired and requires some kind of corrective action. The second is to provide a basis for establishing permit limits on regulated activities (WYPDES & Section 404 permits). The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to be used by the Water Quality Division when translating the narrative goals expressed in the Section 20 standard into appropriate WYPDES permit limits where maintaining agricultural use of the receiving waters is an issue.

Agricultural use of surface water is an opportunistic endeavor. The varying uses as well as the different qualities of the water found in the state are many and the farming and ranching industries have always had to make do with what water is available. The goal expressed in the Section 20 standard is simply to maintain surface water quality at a level that will continue to support the local agricultural uses that have developed around it.

Though the goal is simple, achieving it is not. For the most part, managing water quality for continued agricultural support requires managing the concentration and chemical makeup of dissolved solids. Because of local differences in crop types, soil types and natural water

¹ This policy was finalized in August, 2006 in conjunction with the Triennial Review of the Chapter 1 surface water standards. A modified version of this policy is under consideration by the Wyoming Environmental Quality Council for adoption as an appendix to the Chapter 1 rules. Until a final decision is rendered on that rulemaking, the provisions of this policy remain in effect for establishing effluent limits on discharges that may affect agricultural uses. The only exception is that the formula for calculating SAR limits has been updated to be $SAR < (EC_{ds/M} \times 6.67) - 3.33$.

quality and availability, it isn't possible to establish simple numeric criteria for pollutants such as TDS and SAR that will allow an efficient use of surface water for irrigation purposes. The determination of what is acceptable water quality for irrigation must necessarily involve an evaluation of local agricultural practices and background water quality conditions. For livestock watering uses, it is somewhat less complicated because there are fewer variables to consider.

“Measurable Decrease”

The first part of translating the standard is defining what is meant by “*measurable decrease in crop or livestock production*”. The phrase implies that there is a pre-existing agricultural use of a stream or drainage prior to an application for a WYPDES discharge permit. For livestock watering purposes, a pre-existing use will always be assumed. For irrigation purposes, there needs to be either a current irrigation structure or mechanism in place for diverting water from the stream channel, or a substantial acreage of naturally sub-irrigated pasture within a stream floodplain. Where neither of these conditions exist, there can be no irrigation use, nor loss in crop production attributable to water quality.

Where there are pre-existing agricultural uses, it may often be impossible to measure a loss in crops or livestock that can be attributed to water quality because of the many other factors that will affect actual production. It is also important to be able to predict the probability of a measurable decrease in production rather than relying solely on after-the-fact measurements. Therefore, the implementation of the narrative criteria through WYPDES permits will always involve making reasonable judgments and assumptions.

Effluent limits on historic discharges of produced water will not be affected by this policy in relation to the protection of agricultural uses. Where discharges have been occurring for many years, the permitted quality of those discharges shall be considered to be “background” conditions and be fully protective of the agricultural uses that have developed around them. Therefore, it is not necessary to modify those discharges in order to achieve the goal of “no measurable decrease” in crop or livestock production. It would only be necessary to maintain the existing quality of the discharge. It is important to note, however, that effluent limits on historic discharges may be made where the quality of the discharge is shown to constitute a hazard to humans, livestock or wildlife.

II. Livestock Watering

The basic concept in protecting a livestock watering use is to ensure that water quality is not acutely toxic to livestock or does not contain pollutants in concentrations that would affect growth or reproduction. There are basic effluent limitations provided in the WYPDES permit regulations (*Chapter 2 of the Water Quality Rules and Regulations*) that are intended to ensure that the water is safe for livestock to drink. These limits are:

5000 mg/L TDS;
3000 mg/L Sulfate;
2000 mg/L Chloride;

and each must be achieved at the end-of-pipe prior to mixing with the receiving stream. In addition to the basic effluent limitations the following limits for livestock protection may be incorporated into WYPDES permits when there is reason to believe they may be associated with a discharge:

Selenium	50 µg/L	Total Recoverable
Fluoride	4000 µg/L	Dissolved
Arsenic	20 µg/L	Total Recoverable
Copper	500 µg/L	Dissolved
Cadmium	50 µg/L	Dissolved
Boron	5000 µg/L	Dissolved
Chromium	1000 µg/L	Dissolved
Lead	100 µg/L	Dissolved
Mercury	10 µg/L	Dissolved
Zinc	2500 µg/L	Dissolved

Livestock watering waver

An exception to the limits above may be made whenever the background water quality of the receiving water is worse than the value listed for the associated pollutant or when the livestock producer requests use of the water and thereby accepts any potential risk to his livestock.

III. Irrigation

The interpretation of the Section 20 standard for irrigation is more complex than for livestock watering because there are more variables than just the quality of the water to consider. However, after considering the local circumstances relative to irrigation and crop production, effluent limits can be established on WYPDES permits that will be protective of the pre-existing irrigation uses. The goal is to ensure that pre-existing irrigated crop production will not be diminished as a result of the lowering of water quality.

The basic water quality parameters of concern in regard to irrigation are electrical conductivity (EC) and sodium adsorption ratio (SAR). Protection of irrigation uses where WYPDES permits are involved amounts to deriving appropriate effluent limits for EC and SAR in each instance.

A. Identification and Protection of Irrigation Uses.

Implementation of the Section 20 standard through the WYPDES permitting program involves a sequence of decisions based upon the amount and quality of data that is available to the permit writer. The most basic question is whether a proposed discharge will reach irrigated lands. If the discharge will not reach an irrigated field, either because of natural conditions or water management techniques, it could not affect crop production on that field. For the purposes of this policy, irrigated lands include the following:

1. Artificially Irrigated Lands: Artificially irrigated lands are those where water is intentionally applied for agricultural purposes. Artificially irrigated lands will be identified by the presence of canals, ditches, spreader dikes, spray irrigation systems or any other constructed mechanism intended to divert water from a stream channel for application on adjacent lands.
2. Naturally Irrigated Lands: Naturally irrigated lands are areas of land along stream channels that have enhanced vegetative production due to periodic natural flooding or sub-irrigation. Naturally irrigated lands are those lands where a stream channel is underlain by unconsolidated material and on which the combination of stream flow and channel geometry provides for enhanced productivity of agriculturally significant plants. Naturally irrigated lands may be identified by an evaluation of infra-red aerial photography, surficial geologic maps, wetland mapping, landowner testimony or any combination of that information.

Appropriate effluent limits for EC and SAR will be calculated and applied to WYPDES discharge permits in all instances where the produced water discharge may reach any artificially irrigated lands.

EC and SAR limits will also be applied to WYPDES permits where the produced water discharge may reach stream segments containing sufficient acreage of naturally irrigated land to be considered agriculturally significant. In general, stream segments containing single parcels of naturally irrigated land greater than 20 acres in size or multiple parcels in near proximity that total more than 20 acres shall be considered agriculturally significant. In making this estimation, small drainage bottoms may be excluded from consideration. Two specific criteria which may be used to exclude lands include lack of a persistent active channel and unconsolidated floodplain deposits which are generally less than 50 feet in width.

If there are no pre-existing diversions within reach of a discharge or if the water will be impounded or managed so as not to reach a diversion during the irrigation season, there would be no potential to adversely affect crop production. Likewise, if there are no agriculturally significant, naturally irrigated lands within reach of a discharge there would be no potential to adversely affect crop production. In these circumstances, permit limits would be established to protect other relevant water uses (e.g. livestock watering, wildlife, aquatic life etc.).

B. Data and Information

There is a minimum amount of data that must be collected in every circumstance in order to identify existing irrigation uses and to appropriately set effluent limits on discharges that may affect those uses. Additional information that is beyond the minimum requirements can also be considered to fine tune the permitting decisions in a way that best addresses the various interests for the water.

At a minimum the following information must be obtained:

- Location(s) of irrigation diversions and/or naturally irrigated acreage;
- Crops grown under irrigation;
- Published tolerance values for the most sensitive crop;
- Season of use
- Description of Irrigation Practices

C. Establishing Effluent Limits

A 3-tiered decision making process will be used to establish appropriate effluent limits for EC and SAR whenever a proposed discharge will likely reach irrigated lands. Tier 1 refers to a procedure for setting default EC and SAR limits and is useful in situations where the irrigated crops are salt-tolerant and/or the discharge water quality is relatively good. Tier 2 refers to a process whereby the default limits may be refined to equal background water quality conditions and is intended to be used in situations where the background EC and SAR is worse than the effluent quality. As a final measure, Tier 3 applies where background EC and SAR is better than the effluent quality. The purpose of a Tier 3 analysis is to provide sufficient justification to establish effluent limits that are of a lower quality than the pre-discharge background conditions. Under Tier 3, effluent limits may be established based upon local site conditions and irrigation practices to a level that can be demonstrated to cause no harm to the existing irrigation uses.

1. Tier 1 -Default EC and SAR limits

Default limits for EC and SAR may be used where the quality of the discharge water is relatively good or the irrigated crops are salt-tolerant. The default values shall be based upon the published soil EC tolerance values for the most sensitive crop and shall be calculated as follows:

- a. Default EC limits will be based upon 100 percent yield threshold values for soil EC reported by the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Salt Tolerance Database. In the event that the species of interest is not included in the ARS Salt Tolerance Database, then the following alternative references can be consulted:

(1) Hanson et al. 2006². Agricultural Salinity and Drainage. DANR Pub. 3375, Univ. of Calif. Davis;

(2) Ayers and Westcot. 1985. Water Quality for Agriculture. UN FAO Irrigation and Drainage Paper 29 (revised); and

(3) CPHA. 2002. Western Fertilizer Handbook. 9th Edition. Interstate Pub., Inc., Danville, IL.

The relationship between soil EC values and irrigation water EC values will be: $EC(\text{soil}) = 1.5 EC(\text{water})$, i.e., the published soil EC threshold obtained from the appropriate reference will be divided by the soil concentration factor of 1.5 to establish the discharge EC limit.

However, in circumstances where the background water quality of the receiving water(s) is known to be significantly better than would otherwise be required based on a theoretical 100% yield, effluent limits may be set to maintain that higher quality.

- b. Default SAR values will be extrapolated from the Hanson et al. (2006)² Chart (see Figure 1 attached) based upon the default EC value in each circumstance up to a maximum default value of 10. The effluent limit for SAR will be determined in conjunction with EC so that the relationship of SAR to EC remains within the “no reduction in rate of infiltration” zone of Figure 1. The maximum SAR limit is, therefore, set below the line separating the “no reduction in rate of infiltration” zone from the “slight to moderate reduction in infiltration” zone in the Hanson et al. diagram, which is represented by the following equation: $SAR < (6.67 \times EC) - 3.33$ ³. It must be noted that SAR values are tied to the EC concentration and might need to be adjusted to correlate to the actual EC concentration rather than the theoretical maximum.

Use of the Hanson diagram to extrapolate default effluent limits for SAR is capped at a maximum SAR of 10 to minimize the potential for sodium build-up in poorly drained soils. This 10 SAR cap is only intended to apply when utilizing the default procedure and may be modified according to the provisions of section C.2 "Refining EC and SAR Limits", described below.

² This reference has been updated to the 2006 version of the Agricultural Salinity and Drainage Manual from the previously cited 1999 version

³ This Formula has been updated from the previously used $SAR < (EC_{ds/M} \times 7.10) - 2.48$ in accordance with the 2006 Salinity and Drainage Manual.

- c. At a minimum, the EC and SAR limits will apply during the irrigation season and when flows are sufficient to support the use. On sub-irrigated lands and passively irrigated lands such as those under spreader dike systems, the irrigation season shall generally be considered to be year-round.

2. Refining EC and SAR limits (Tiers 2&3)

Establishing EC and SAR limits based simply on the most sensitive crop is the most stringent approach and would be protective of the irrigation use in all circumstances. It may be possible to refine those values if additional information is available showing that less stringent effluent limits would be adequately protective. This type of showing can be made by demonstrating that background water quality conditions are of a lower quality than the default values or by demonstrating that because of local soil conditions and irrigation practices there would be no harm to crop production from less stringent EC and SAR limits.

a. Tier 2 - Background Water Quality

If sufficient data is available to demonstrate or calculate that the pre-existing background water quality at the point(s) of diversion is worse than the effluent quality, EC and SAR effluent limits may be based upon those background conditions rather than tolerance values for the most sensitive crop.

(1). Measured Data: Background water quality may be established based upon published pre-discharge historic data. Generally, this data only exists on larger, perennial, mainstem stream channels where historic gauging has taken place. Actual measured data is the most reliable means of establishing background and must be considered on those waters where it is available.

(2). Calculated Background: On intermittent and ephemeral stream channels, pre-discharge water quality data is usually scarce or non-existent and very difficult to collect. In these circumstances, background water quality can be estimated by conducting soil surveys on land that has been historically irrigated from the subject stream.

In the event that soil studies are used as a means to estimate baseline water quality for a given drainage, the following requirements apply:

(i) Sample Site Selection: Soil samples shall be taken at semi-random sites within each contiguous irrigated segment downstream of the proposed discharge. "Semi-random" in this case is intended to mean that the applicant will identify the various major distinguishing terrain zones within each

irrigated segment and select sample sites randomly within each terrain zone. For example, the channel bottom may constitute one terrain zone, the first small terrace above the channel bottom may be another terrain zone, and the adjacent meadow or field may be a single remaining terrain zone, or that meadow / field may actually be comprised of several other known zones such as discharge-affected soils vs. non-affected soils, sub-irrigated reaches vs. non-sub-irrigated reaches, etc..

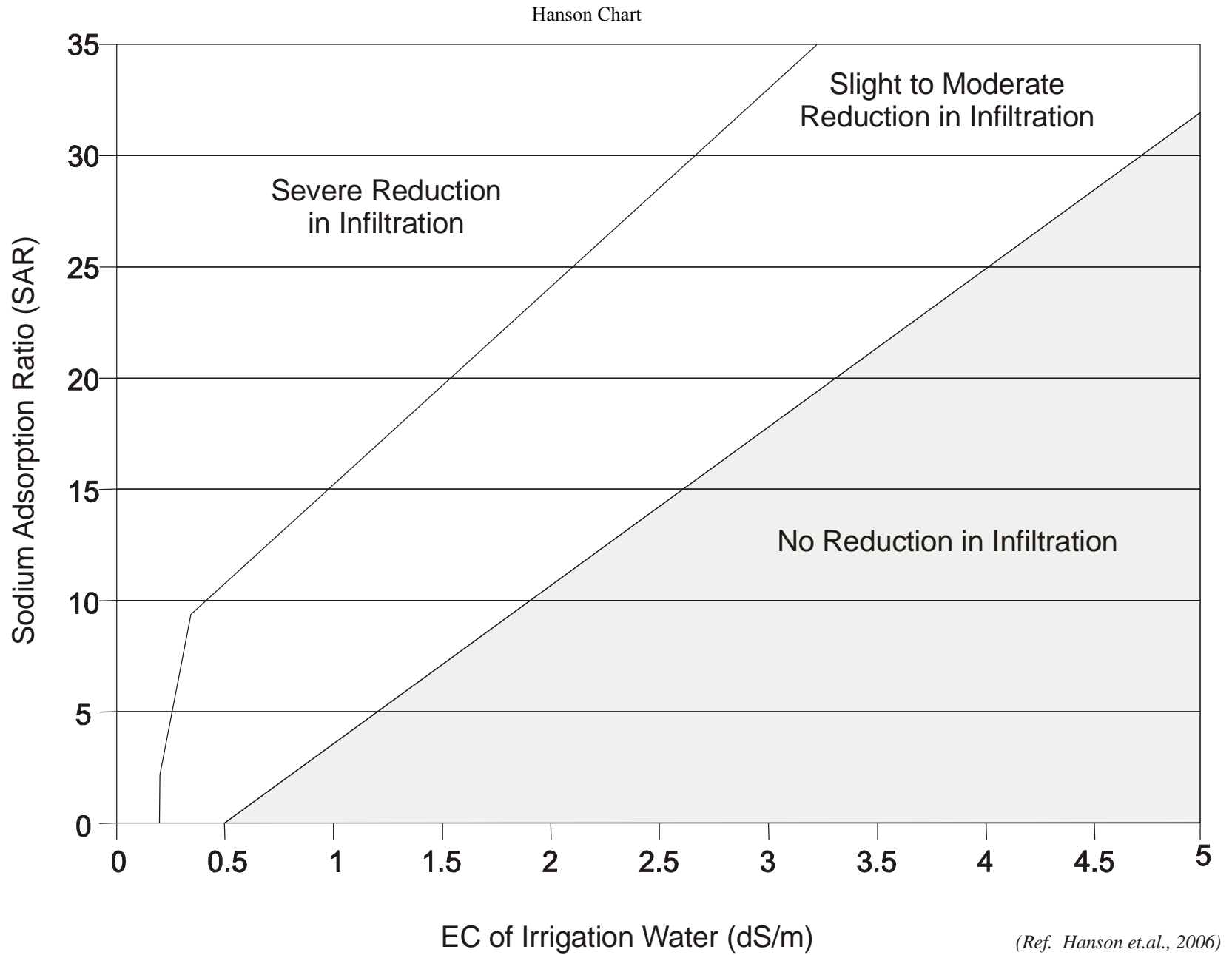
(ii) Number of Sample Sites: Listed below are the minimum number of soil sample sites required for each of the identified terrain zones (based on zone area) within a contiguous irrigated segment:

Zone Area	Minimum Number of Sample Sites
0 – 5 acres	3
5 - 10	5
10 + acres	7

(iii) Sample Collection: Sample sites must be located a minimum of 50 feet apart from one another. Each sample site shall be sampled at a minimum of four depths (0-12”, 13-24”, 25-36”, 37-48”). If alfalfa is present within the terrain zone, each sample site within that terrain zone must be sampled at a total of 6 depths (at the above-noted depths, plus 49-60” and 61-72”). Each 12-inch depth sample must be analyzed either individually or combined (composited) with other corresponding depth samples from the other sample sites within the same terrain zone (i.e., all 0-12” samples from a given terrain zone bulked together and analyzed as a single composite sample).

(iv) Sample Analysis: At a minimum, a saturated paste extract for each sample shall be analyzed for EC. Though not necessary for the estimation of background water conductivity, it is advisable to also analyze the soil samples for pH, SAR, soil texture and exchangeable sodium percentage (ESP) to avoid having to duplicate the sampling if the results indicate that a “no harm analysis” (*item b. below*) needs to be completed. Percent organic matter shall be analyzed in the surface 0-12 inch samples only. In addition, analyses to identify the clay mineralogy types present in the soils may also be warranted.

Figure 1



(v) Soil Report Preparation: At a minimum the applicant shall submit:

- i. A map or diagram identifying where each of the soil sample sites were located. At a minimum, the map or diagram must show the basic topography and stream course, irrigation structures (*if present - such as spreader dams or head gates*), estimated boundaries of the irrigated acreage, surface ownership of the irrigated acreage (*including downstream irrigated areas*) and section / township / range identification. This map must also show any delineated terrain zones, plus elevations of the terrain zones;
- ii. An accompanying location table which includes the quarter / quarter, section, township, range, and latitude / longitude for each sample site;
- iii. Summary data table showing the analytical results for each of the soil parameters listed above, for each depth, at each sample site.
- iv. All associated lab sheets.

b. Tier 3 - No Harm Analysis

The actual effects of EC and SAR on crop production are variable based upon soil type and chemistry and may be mitigated to some extent by managing irrigation practices. EC and SAR effluent limits may also be established based upon a scientifically defensible site specific study that examines local soil characteristics, natural water quality, expected crop yield, irrigation practices and/or any other relevant factor related to crop production.

Because of the very site-specific nature of this approach and the number and complexity of variables that may need to be considered, it is not very useful to specify any particular type of analysis in this policy. When taking this approach, however, there is a burden of proof placed upon the applicant to demonstrate through a comprehensive study that levels of EC and/or SAR higher than either the default values or estimated background water quality would most likely not measurably harm an existing irrigation use. This approach will allow a degree of creativity regarding landowner preferences and management. Refined limits for EC and SAR resulting from a "no harm" analysis should incorporate a reasonable margin of safety to account for variables that cannot be precisely measured or modeled.

c. Irrigation Waiver

An exception to EC or SAR limits established under the Tier 1, 2 or 3 procedures may be made when affected landowners request use of the water and thereby accept any potential risk to crop production on their lands. Irrigation waivers will only be granted in association with an irrigation management plan that provides reasonable assurance that the lower quality water will be confined to the targeted lands.

d. Reasonable Access Requirement

The procedure for establishing default EC and SAR limits is intended to provide the ability to permit the discharge of high quality water without an obligation to conduct site specific studies. In practice, the use of the default procedure will only apply where permitted discharges are of exceptionally high quality. In many applications, appropriate limits for EC and SAR will have to be based on refined procedures rather than default. Because the refined procedures require the acquisition of site-specific data, it is necessary that permit applicants and/or the DEQ have reasonable access to obtain the required information. In circumstances where a landowner chooses to deny access for the purpose of developing a Section 20 analysis, EC and SAR limits will be based upon the best information that can be reasonably obtained and may be less stringent than Tier 1 default limits.

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SECTION 20 DECISION PROCESS

