



A NEW STEP FORWARD IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: Three new National Technical Regulations on ambient environmental quality

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On May 15th, 2025, the Minister of Agriculture and Environment issued Circular No. 01/2025/TT-BNNMT - a key legal instrument officially promulgating three new National Technical Regulations (QCVN) on ambient environmental quality. These include QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT on noise, QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT on vibration, and QCVN 43:2025/BNNMT on sediment quality. This represents a significant step forward in state management of environmental protection, with the core objective of improving living environment quality, safeguarding public health, and promoting the sustainable development of the nation.

This Circular will officially take effect from November 14th, 2025, fully replacing previous regulations that had been applied for many years, including QCVN 26:2010/BTNMT, QCVN 27:2010/BTNMT, and QCVN 43:2017/BTNMT. Notably, the Circular also sets out a clear and flexible transitional roadmap. Facilities already in operation or investment projects approved before the effective date of the Circular are allowed to continue applying the old regulations (QCVN 26:2010/BTNMT, QCVN 27:2010/BTNMT) and relevant local government regulations until December 31st, 2026. Conversely, new investment projects or expansion projects must comply immediately with the provisions of QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT and QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT from the effective date of the Circular. This arrangement demonstrates that regulatory authorities have anticipated the challenges of adaptation for existing businesses and projects. Such an approach helps minimize conflicts between economic development objectives and environmental protection goals, creating favorable conditions for enterprises to transition while still ensuring the long-term objective of improving environmental quality.

1. THE NECESSITY OF ISSUING NEW QCVNS

The promulgation of new national technical regulations on noise, vibration, and sediment quality is not a sudden change but the outcome of a process of continuous review and updating, arising from the urgent needs of environmental management practice. Although previous QCVNs played an important role

in establishing the initial legal framework for pollution control, after years of application their limitations became evident.

One of the most significant shortcomings of the old regulations was the lack of specificity and feasibility in implementation. Previous provisions did not provide clear guidance on identifying pollution sources, detailed classification of affected areas, or methods for handling violations. This created difficulties for regulatory authorities in law enforcement and for enterprises in compliance. In addition, emission thresholds were rather rigid, failing to take into account practical factors such as the duration of noise or vibration, or to provide baseline-adjusted limits.

Furthermore, the measurement methods referenced in the old regulations had become outdated or lacked sufficient detail. This posed challenges for monitoring agencies in implementation and undermined the reliability of environmental data.

The need for more detailed regulations that consider variable factors and provide clear methodological guidance has become an inevitable trend to enhance management effectiveness. This change reflects an environmental management system that continues to improve, learning from practical experience and moving toward the application of more modern, science-based management tools. Such an approach not only enables state authorities to enforce regulations more effectively but also creates a transparent and comprehensible legal environment for regulated entities.

The review and updating of technical regulations is mandated every five years or earlier if necessary under Article 35 of the Law on Standards and Technical Regulations, ensuring that regulations remain aligned with practical realities and scientific advances.

2. QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT AND QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT – MORE COMPREHENSIVE CONTROL FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT and QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT are national technical regulations on noise and vibration, prescribing maximum permissible noise levels in areas where people live, work, and conduct activities. These regulations cover noise and

vibration generated from production, business, and service facilities, construction sites under operation, transportation activities, and daily life activities. However, they do not apply to occupational noise exposure in workplaces.

The new and notable features of QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT and QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT, compared with QCVN 26:2010/BTNMT and QCVN 27:2010/BTNMT, represent a significant advancement in noise management:

More detailed classification of affected areas: Instead of the previous two categories, “special areas” and “ordinary areas,” the new QCVNs classify into specific zones (A, B, C, D, E) based on the type of construction and sensitivity to noise.

Threshold adjustments by noise/vibration duration: The new QCVNs allow threshold limits to be adjusted according to the duration of noise and vibration emissions. This provides a degree of flexibility, accepting high-intensity noise or vibration for short periods while maintaining strict control over continuous emissions. Such flexibility reduces unnecessary compliance burdens for enterprises in certain cases while ensuring overall environmental protection. It encourages activities that generate short-term loud noise to have clear mitigation plans to minimize cumulative impacts.

Inclusion of noise and vibration limits from transportation: For the first time, QCVN 26:2025/BNNMT and QCVN 27:2025/BNNMT introduce specific limits for noise from road and rail traffic, differentiated by area classification (A, B, C, D, E) and by time (day/night). Transportation noise and vibration are among the most common and significant sources of urban pollution, but had not previously been regulated separately.

Adjustment based on background noise/vibration levels: The new QCVNs provide clear guidance on measuring background levels and adjusting results when differences between emitted noise/vibration and background levels occur (with reductions of 1–3 dB depending on deviation). This ensures accuracy and fairness in assessment, particularly where background levels are close to emission levels but within a 10 dB difference. In real environments, there is always some background noise and vibration. The new rules ensure that only the incremental impact from the source is assessed. This enhances objectivity and scientific rigor, reduces disputes between regulators and regulated entities, and encourages stakeholders to focus only on controlling noise they themselves generate.

Updated and detailed measurement methods: The new QCVNs provide clearer requirements on measurement locations, equipment, conditions (avoiding rain, winds stronger than level 4), measurement duration, and calculation methods for each type of noise and vibration. This technical detailing ensures consistency, accuracy, and reliability of monitoring data. Reliable monitoring data form the foundation for regulatory decision-making and enforcement. Enhanced measurement standards also strengthen the evidentiary basis for law enforcement while encouraging monitoring units to upgrade technical capacity and equipment.

3. QCVN 43:2025/BNNMT - SEDIMENT QUALITY: A FOUNDATION FOR PROTECTING AQUATIC LIFE

QCVN 43:2025/BNNMT is the national technical regulation on sediment quality, prescribing threshold values for surface water and marine sediment quality parameters. This regulation applies to the assessment and control of sediment quality for the purpose of protecting aquatic life. It is applicable to state environmental management agencies as well as organizations and individuals conducting environmental monitoring and sediment quality assessment on land and in Vietnam’s marine areas.

Compared to QCVN 43:2017/BTNMT, QCVN 43:2025/BNNMT largely retains the same definitions, number of parameters, and threshold values. However, the new regulation focuses on standardization and updates to improve feasibility and effectiveness in implementation:

Standardization of nomenclature and chemical formulas: The new QCVN adopts the nomenclature of substances in accordance with TCVN 5530:2010 - Chemical Terminology – Nomenclature of Elements and Compounds, and supplements specific chemical formulas. This is particularly important as sediment quality QCVNs aim to control cumulative pollutants in the environment, mainly organic parameters. Clear chemical definitions provide monitoring and management units with a more solid basis for identifying and controlling pollutants.

Updated measurement methods: The measurement methods referenced in QCVN 43:2017/BTNMT have been updated or replaced. QCVN 43:2025/BNNMT incorporates new methods consistent with national standards (TCVN) and equivalent or higher-precision international standards. This ensures that sediment monitoring and analysis use advanced techniques, yielding more accurate and reliable environmental data.



Additional management provisions: The new QCVN introduces specific management requirements, including mandatory periodic sediment quality monitoring and the use of monitoring results to directly provide and disclose environmental quality information to the public. Such activities must be conducted by organizations that meet the legal capacity requirements for environmental monitoring. Moreover, it emphasizes that periodic sediment monitoring must be aligned with monitoring objectives to select appropriate parameters. These additions enhance the legal validity and usability of monitoring results to support state environmental management objectives, enabling timely reflection of pollution accumulation trends in sediments.

4. EXPECTATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN STATE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

The promulgation of three new National Technical Regulations on noise, vibration, and sediment quality brings high expectations for national environmental management, aiming toward a better living environment for the people and the sustainable development of the nation.

First, the new regulations will enhance feasibility and effectiveness in law enforcement. With more detailed classifications of affected areas, clearer provisions on pollution sources (including annexes listing specific equipment), and specific guidance on determining and calculating measurement results, state management agencies will have a stronger legal basis to identify pollution sources, assess violations, and apply appropriate corrective measures. This will minimize disputes and difficulties in handling administrative violations while strengthening the accountability of organizations and individuals causing pollution.

Second, the new provisions will ensure greater accuracy and fairness in environmental quality assessments. The inclusion of threshold adjustments based on emission duration and baseline correction rules in the noise and vibration QCVNs represents an important step forward. This allows for the assessment of the actual impacts of pollution sources, eliminating interference from surrounding environments or intermittent activities. Such flexibility not only provides enterprises with a clear basis for managing their operations but also establishes a fair legal environment that encourages more effective pollution reduction measures.

Third, monitoring capacity and the quality of environmental data will be significantly improved. Detailed regulations on measurement locations,

equipment, conditions, and calculation methods for each type of pollution (continuous, impulsive, or intermittent noise and vibration) will standardize monitoring procedures nationwide. Updating national and international measurement standards also ensures that collected data are accurate, reliable, and comparable. High-quality data provide a solid foundation for policymaking, environmental planning, and timely management decisions.

Fourth, the new regulations reflect a more comprehensive approach to environmental protection, particularly with the addition of threshold limits for noise and vibration from transportation. These are common and highly impactful sources of urban pollution that had not previously been specifically regulated. Controlling such sources will contribute significantly to reducing overall pollution, improving air quality, and enhancing living conditions in residential and urban areas.

Fifth, these improvements will effectively support planning and sustainable development. With clearer and more detailed standards on noise and vibration, urban planners and investors will have better tools to assess the environmental impacts of projects, thereby incorporating environmentally friendly design, construction, and operational solutions from the outset. This not only prevents pollution but also promotes harmonious development between the economy and the environment.

It can be said that the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment's issuance of Circular No. 01/2025/TT-BNNMT, along with the three new National Technical Regulations on ambient environmental quality, marks an important milestone, reflecting progress in Vietnam's environmental management. These new provisions not only address shortcomings of the previous system but also demonstrate a strategic vision, aiming to protect public health and comprehensively improve quality of life in a sustainable manner.

For the QCVNs to be effectively implemented, there must be close coordination and strong commitment from all stakeholders: state management agencies in disseminating, guiding, and supervising implementation; organizations, individuals, and enterprises in proactively studying, complying with, and investing in environmentally friendly technologies; and the wider community in raising awareness and jointly protecting the living environment. Only then can we build a greener, cleaner, and more livable Vietnam for both present and future generations ■