facilities that burn hazardous wastes) to notify the public before they hold a trial burn.<sup>1</sup>

EPA anticipates that these regulations will provide an opportunity for the public to participate earlier in the permitting process. In addition, the rule will give the public increased access to facility and permitting information. Finally, we hope that the rule will help people become involved in the permitting process and increase understanding of hazardous waste management facilities.

## D. The Rule: From Proposal to Final

EPA proposed the RCRA Expanded Public Participation and Revisions to Combustion Permitting Procedures rule on June 2, 1994 (59 FR 28680–28711). The proposed rule contained changes and additions to the RCRA public participation regulations (40 CFR 124) and RCRA Subtitle C permitting regulations (40 CFR 270).

Today, EPA is finalizing the public participation portion of the proposal (with a number of changes in response to comments received by the Agency during the comment period for the proposed rule—see Section IV below), which includes changes to both Parts 124 and 270. The Agency is not finalizing the proposed revisions to combustion permitting procedures at this time.

EPA decided to separate the two portions for a number of reasons. First, the public comments on the proposed rule were more favorable towards the public participation changes. On the other hand, the commenters were less satisfied with the proposed combustion permitting changes, particularly those changes regarding the trial burn. The Agency is currently considering and addressing the commenters' concerns on the proposed combustion permitting changes. In the meantime, EPA sees no reason to delay the important changes to the public participation provisions.

Moreover, EPA is committed to issuing comprehensive emissions standards for combustion facilities under RCRA and the Clean Air Act. The Agency anticipates issuing a proposed rule on these standards in the fall of 1995. Due to potential overlap between the procedures in the emissions standards proposed rule and the combustion permitting procedures in the June 2, 1994 proposed rule, EPA has decided to take more time to consider the permitting provisions in the June 2 proposal. We intend to find the best possible solution to coordinate these two rulemakings.

Finally, EPA realized that the proposed rule may have caused some confusion. A few commenters pointed to the different character of the public participation changes and the combustion permitting changes. The commenters expressed concern over combining these two dissimilar portions in the same rule. Moreover, a number of commenters seemed to be confused over the applicability of the rule. In particular, since the combustion permitting provisions would apply only to combustion facilities, and the proposed rule was an outgrowth of the Combustion Strategy, a number of commenters seemed confused over the applicability of the public participation procedures to all RCRA TSDFs.

## III. Applicability of Today's Rule

Today's rule promulgates changes and additions to Parts 124 and 270 in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Part 124 changes, which include new and earlier public involvement steps and procedures, apply to every facility that has or is seeking a RCRA subtitle C permit to treat, store, or dispose of hazardous waste, unless exempted under a specific section. The changes to Part 270, in §§ 270.2, 270.14, and 270.30, also apply to every facility. The changes to §§ 270.62 and 270.66, however, apply only to combustion facilities.

The rule does not require RCRA facilities that are already involved in the permitting process to step back in the process to comply with the new requirements. Instead, the rule will apply to a facility according to what stage of the process the facility is in when the rule becomes effective. For instance, if a facility has submitted its part B permit application before the effective date of this rule, then the rule does not require the facility to hold a pre-application meeting under §124.31. This facility would, however, have to comply with all requirements relating to steps in the permitting process that it has not yet undertaken.

IV. Review of Public Comments, Responses, and Changes From the Proposed Rule

The following (IV. A through E) is a section-by-section summary of the most significant comments on the proposed rule, EPA's responses to those comments, and an explanation of any changes from the proposed rule to the final. All of the public comments and EPA's comprehensive response to comments document on this rulemaking are available through the RCRA Docket (see the paragraph entitled **ADDRESSES**, above).

The most significant changes in the final rule involve our decision to use guidance, instead of rule language, to encourage facilities to strive toward some of the important goals in the proposed rule. EPA recognized in the proposal that some of the proposed regulatory provisions were very general and requested comment on how they could be effectively implemented (see, e.g., 59 FR 28702). In response, commenters argued that several portions of the proposed regulatory language were vague and would spawn disputes, controversy, and litigation. The commenters suggested that EPA relocate some of the proposed regulatory text to the preamble as guidance.

EPA found these comments persuasive in certain instances. The development of today's rule has, from the start, involved a balance between promoting broader, more equitable public participation while maintaining the flexibility for individual permit writers, facilities, and communities to adopt the most appropriate, site-specific approach consistent with the principles of fairness and openness. Some of the principles underlying the proposed and final rules are inherently difficult to prescribe through regulation. For example, it is possible to require an applicant to hold a meeting; it is much more difficult to require through regulation that the meeting be conducted in an equitable fashion, since the steps required to accomplish this objective will necessarily vary from situation to situation. Although the final rule retains most of the proposed regulatory changes, EPA concluded that, in certain instances, the need to maintain flexibility is inconsistent with a national regulatory approach. In these instances, as explained more fully in the sections below, EPA has decided to proceed by using guidance, rather than regulations, to encourage facilities to adopt and strive towards a number of the goals in the proposed rule. The Agency will provide some guidance in today's preamble; however, we also anticipate releasing a guidance document, in the near future, to help permitting agencies and facilities to implement today's rule.

The Agency believes that facility owners, State environmental agencies, tribes, and private citizens are often in the best position to determine what modes of communication and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The owner or operator of a combustion unit must conduct a trial burn as part of the permitting process for a combustion unit. The trial burn is a demonstration period held by the owner or operator of a combustion unit to test the unit's ability to meet the regulatory performance standards for treatment of hazardous wastes. The permitting agency uses the results of the trial burn to establish operating conditions in the RCRA permit.