

How To Obtain a Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) from the EMA

Many investor-scale projects, resorts, industrial facilities, marinas, subdivisions above certain sizes, trigger the Certificate of Environmental Clearance requirement under the CEC Rules 2001. This guide walks you through the EMA Customer Service Portal, the standard CEC pathway, and the more onerous Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) pathway where the Authority determines an EIA is required.

Key Points

- CECs are administered by the Environmental Management Authority (EMA).
- Applications flow through the EMA Customer Service Portal (fully digital as of 2026).
- Application fee: TT\$500, payable via E-Pay or direct deposit to the EMA's Republic Bank account.
- A Status of Land Correspondence from TCPD is strongly recommended before applying.
- Where significant environmental or human-health impacts are identified, an EIA under the CEC Rules 2001 is required.
- The CEC itself, when issued, includes mandatory mitigation and monitoring requirements.
- See the CEC (Designated Activities) Order for the full list of triggering activities.

1. When you need a CEC

Under the Environmental Management Act and the CEC Rules 2001, a Certificate of Environmental Clearance is required before a person can undertake any activity listed in the CEC (Designated Activities) Order. Broadly, that includes:

- Construction of hotels, resorts, and residential subdivisions above stated size thresholds.
- Industrial and manufacturing facilities.
- Quarries and mineral extraction.
- Marinas, ports, and coastal infrastructure.
- Power stations and utility-scale renewables.
- Land reclamation, dredging, and other coastal or marine works.

Consult the current Designated Activities Order to confirm the specific triggers for your project.

2. Get a Status of Land Correspondence first

Before applying for a CEC, obtain a Status of Land Correspondence from the Town & Country Planning Division (TCPD). This confirms the land-use position on the site, essentially, whether the intended activity is consistent with the applicable planning designation.

Applying for a CEC without a favourable land-status letter often means the EMA cannot progress the file, the two workstreams need to move together.

3. Create an EMA Customer Service Portal account

Since 2026 the CEC application process is fully digital. Applicants create an account on the EMA Customer Service Portal at <https://www.ema.co.tt/our-environment/ema-customer-service-portal/>. The portal replaces paper-based submissions and hosts:

- The automated CEC application form.
- Document upload facilities.
- E-Pay for the application fee.
- Application status tracking and correspondence.

4. Pay the application fee

The application fee is TT\$500. Payment options:

- E-Pay through the Customer Service Portal (primary route).
- Direct deposit to the EMA's Republic Bank account (Chequing # 290101135701, Tragarete Road branch), in which case you download a Payment Request Form from the portal, deposit, and upload the receipt back to the portal to finalise submission.

5. Submit the application

The application form captures:

- The nature of the proposed activity.
- Location, with map, coordinates, and a Status of Land Correspondence attached.
- Site description, adjacent land uses, sensitive receptors.
- Preliminary environmental impact assessment, nature and severity of anticipated impacts.
- Proposed mitigation measures.
- Applicant details, corporate structure, and beneficial ownership.

Attach every supporting document (technical drawings, site photographs, existing environmental studies) that helps the EMA understand the project.

6. Administrative acceptability

The EMA first reviews the application for administrative acceptability, is the package complete? The Authority may request adjustments and additional information before it accepts the application as complete. Only once accepted does the substantive assessment begin.

7. Standard CEC pathway

Where the EMA determines that potential negative impacts can be mitigated through measures the applicant is willing to accept, it issues a CEC. The CEC will include:

- Description of the approved activity.
- Mandatory mitigation measures (design, operational, and monitoring).
- Monitoring and reporting requirements.
- Conditions relating to modifications, extensions, and periodic renewal.

The CEC binds the operator throughout the life of the activity. Breach can lead to prosecution and revocation of the CEC.

8. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) pathway

Where the EMA determines that the project may have significant environmental or human-health impacts, it requires the applicant to conduct a full Environmental Impact Assessment under the CEC Rules 2001. An EIA typically:

- Is prepared by an EMA-approved EIA practitioner.
- Involves scoping, technical studies (biological, physical, socio-economic), and impact modelling.
- Requires public consultation, public notice, comment period, and often a public meeting.
- Produces an EIA Report with an Environmental Management Plan.
- Adds 6–18 months to the CEC timeline.

Larger investor projects, resorts above certain sizes, marinas, major industrial facilities, land reclamation, should assume from the outset that an EIA will be required and budget accordingly.

9. Practical sequencing

The CEC pathway must be sequenced with the other approvals a project needs. Typical sequence:

1. Site identification and diligence.
2. Status of Land Correspondence from TCPD.
3. Foreign Investor Licence application (if a foreign investor).
4. Outline Planning Permission from TCPD.
5. CEC application to the EMA (in parallel with detailed design).
6. Final Planning Permission from TCPD.
7. Fiscal Incentives / SEZ application, if applicable.
8. Building permit from the Municipal / THA authority.
9. Construction.

The Commission can help sequence these workstreams so that dependencies are respected and no workstream blocks another unnecessarily.

Sources

- EMA, Certificate of Environmental Clearance (ema.co.tt/our-environment/cec)
- Ministry of Planning & Development, CEC guidance
- CEC (Designated Activities) Order
- Certificate of Environmental Clearance Rules 2001

This guide is an informational summary prepared by the Tobago Foreign Direct Investment Commission for the benefit of prospective investors. It does not constitute legal, tax, or financial advice. Legislation and administrative practice change from time to time, always consult a qualified attorney-at-law admitted in Trinidad & Tobago before acting on any of this material. Where a discrepancy exists between this guide and the underlying statute, the statute prevails.