

Moving Toward SAFE DRINKING WATER



**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
FEDERAL DRINKING WATER STANDARDS.**

From
the
U.S.
Environmental Protection Agency

1. What is the Safe Drinking Water Act?

The Safe Drinking Water Act, P.L. 93-523, was passed by Congress to ensure that water supplied to the public is safe to drink. Under this Law suppliers of water have important responsibilities. In most cases it is the States' job to administer the drinking water programs and make sure that these responsibilities are met. However, if a State can't or doesn't choose to, and in special cases such as those that exist on Indian lands and interstate carrier conveyances, the Federal Government -- the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) -- has responsibility for implementing the Law.

If the water supply in your community is under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government then this brochure is for you, regardless of whether you are a tribal chairman, public official, or concerned citizen. It will help you to understand some of the provisions of the Law, EPA's role in the Safe Drinking Water Act and where to locate EPA regional offices for answers to questions or more information about P.L. 93-523.

2. What are some of EPA's responsibilities under the Safe Drinking Water Act?

The Law states that one of EPA's responsibilities is to establish minimum national drinking water regulations or standards for all public water systems -- both publicly and privately owned -- having 15 service connections or regularly serving an average of 25 people daily at least 60 days each year. This means that your water supply, whether it is a community system serving water to year-round residents, or a non-community system (for example, a motel, bus or campsite) serving intermittent users such as tourists, will be affected by the Act.

3. Has EPA set minimum national standards for drinking water?

Yes, the National Interim Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NIPDWR) became effective June 24, 1977. These interim regulations have established the maximum amount of certain contaminants -- bacteria, turbidity (cloudiness), radioactivity, ten inorganic chemicals and six organic pesticides -- permitted in drinking water.

4. What should you know about P.L. 93-523?

You should know that the Law requires water suppliers to:

- make sure that maximum contaminant levels (MCL's) are not exceed;
- sample and analyze water on a regular basis;

- meet recordkeeping and reporting requirements; and
- notify the public whenever water quality deteriorates or the water system fails to operate properly.

5. What is a maximum contaminant level (MCL)?

An MCL is the highest amount of a particular contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. MCL's vary, depending on the contaminant being measured, but generally are expressed in milligrams per liter (mg/l).

6. How often should drinking water be sampled and who analyzes the samples?

Three types of sampling are described in the regulations:

- initial sampling;
- routine sampling, which is merely the continuation of the initial sampling effort at the required frequencies; and
- check sampling, which must be conducted whenever an initial or routine sample analysis shows that an MCL has been exceeded.

Sampling frequency depends on the source of the drinking water; well water (groundwater) does not need to be tested as often as water from rivers or lakes (surface water). It also depends on which contaminants are being tested for; when testing for bacteria, the number of samples taken depends on the number of people served by the water supply. Samples must be analyzed by laboratories that are State-certified or approved by EPA.

7. What if a water system is unable to comply with the regulations?

Sometimes -- because of financial reasons or because of the quality of the water source -- an MCL requirement cannot be met. In such cases, a water supplier may apply to an EPA regional office for a variance or an exemption which if granted would give the water supplier additional time to attain compliance. Variances and exemptions -- techniques which allow a system to exceed national drinking water regulations -- cannot, however, be issued for bacteriological problems or to reduce monitoring (sampling and analysis) requirements.

8. When can a variance be granted?

A water supplier can apply for a variance if it will not result in an unreasonable risk to health and if the quality of the water is so poor that an MCL cannot be met, despite the use of the best available treatment technology, taking cost into consideration. Variances will not often be granted, however, because to qualify for one a system must first have a "generally available" treatment method in place and operating

The advantage of a variance is that it can last indefinitely; however, EPA will review each one at least once every three years to make sure that the situation leading to the variance has not changed.

9. When can an exemption be granted?

An exemption can be granted if it will not result in an unreasonable risk to health and if for compelling reasons a system cannot comply. For example, an exemption can be granted to a small system that is unable to afford additional treatment.

In general, an exemption cannot be extended beyond January 1, 1981. In addition, only those water systems in operation as of June 24, 1977, may request time extensions (exemptions) to meet the regulations.

10. How can a water supplier apply for a variance or an exemption?

To apply for a variance or an exemption, a formal written request must be sent to the nearest EPA regional office including:

- a detailed statement of the problem;
- an analysis of the drinking water as performed by a certified laboratory; and
- a proposal, including dates, for bringing the water system into compliance (compliance schedule).

If confused about whether a variance or an exemption is appropriate in a specific case, contact the EPA regional office.

11. How long will it take EPA to act on variance and exemption requests?

EPA will usually act on a request within 90 days. If for some reason EPA decides to deny the request, a water supplier has 30 days to submit additional information. If EPA decides to approve the request, the water supplier will receive written notice of such action, including information concerning the proposed schedule for compliance.

12. What about recordkeeping?

Records of bacteriological, turbidity and chemical analyses, variances and exemptions, written reports, and actions taken to correct violations of the NIPDWR, must be kept for a specified period of time and at a location convenient to the water supply. Summaries of laboratory reports of bacteriological and chemical analyses may be kept instead of laboratory sheets, as long as the summaries contain the pertinent sampling and analysis information.

13. What about reporting requirements?

The results of individual tests do not have to be reported. Routine sample reports should be submitted within 40 days of a required test. There are also special reporting procedures to follow when check samples have been taken and when a violation has occurred.

14. Are there any other reporting requirements?

Yes -- reporting to the public. Public notification is required when:

- an MCL is exceeded;
- a variance or an exemption is granted or if a compliance schedule cannot be followed;
- an approved testing procedure is not used; and
- the required sampling and analyses is not performed.

Such notification, which serves to advise people of potential or actual health hazards, may be given a variety of ways -- by mail, in the newspaper, over radio or TV, or at the local post office or community center.

15. How much will all this cost and who will pay for it?

The cost of safe drinking water is dependent upon many factors. For example, if your community is served by a small water supply system that has not kept up with modern technology then you may now have to pay more for good water than you have in the past. The Safe Drinking Water Act does not provide funds to water suppliers to upgrade their treatment facilities or to build new ones. Some low or moderate income areas are, however, eligible to receive grants or loans from Federal Agencies and Indian communities may receive assistance from the Indian Health Service. But by and large many communities will have to pay for required improvements with local funds.

16. Would you like to know more -- or do you have any questions -- about the Safe Drinking Water Act?

Through P.L. 93-523 EPA hopes to protect the public's health by making sure that water is safe to drink. Additional information may be obtained from the following:

EPA Regional Contacts

EPA - Region I
Attention: Floyd Taylor
Chief, Water Supply Branch
Water Programs Division
John F. Kennedy Federal Building
Boston, MA 02203
Telephone: 617-223-6486

EPA - Region II
Attention: Harry Smith
Chief, Water Supply Branch
Environmental Programs Division
Federal Building - 26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10007
Telephone: 212-264-1800

EPA - Region III
Attention: Ramon G. Lee
Chief, Water Supply Branch
Water Programs Division
Curtis Building
6th and Walnut Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19106
Telephone: 215-597-8227

EPA - Region IV
Attention: Gary D. Hutchinson
Chief, Water Supply Branch
345 Courtland Street, NE
Atlanta, GA 30308
Telephone: 404-881-3781

EPA - Region V
Attention: Joseph Harrison
Chief, Water Supply Branch
13th Floor
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60604
Telephone: 312-353-2151

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Massachusetts, Rhode Island,
Connecticut

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Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico

Pennsylvania, West Virginia,
Virginia, Maryland, Delaware,
District of Columbia

Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina,
South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama,
Mississippi, Florida

Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan,
Illinois, Ohio, Indiana

EPA Regional Contacts

EPA - Region VI
Attention: Charles W. Sever
Chief, Water Supply Branch
1201 Elm Street
First International Building
Dallas, TX 75270
Telephone: 214-749-2106

EPA - Region VII
Attention: Otmar O. Olson
Chief, Water Supply Program
1735 Baltimore Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64108
Telephone: 816-374-5429

EPA - Region VIII
Attention: Jack Hoffbuhr
Chief, Water Supply Section
Water Division
1860 Lincoln Street
Denver, CO 80203
Telephone: 303-837-2731

EPA - Region IX
Attention: John Wise
Water Supply Coordinator
Water Supply Task Force
100 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94111
Telephone: 415-556-0774

EPA - Region X
Attention: William A. Mullen
Chief, Drinking Water Programs
M/S 409, Water Division
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101
Telephone: 206-442-1223

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