

SMALL WATER SYSTEMS

Historical Background

In 1974 the United States Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. The purpose of the Act is to assure that the drinking water supplied to the public is safe, wholesome and potable.

Provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act are carried out by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA is required to establish regulations and set national drinking standards which all public water supplies must meet.

The Safe Drinking Water Act was amended in 1986 to require the development of additional drinking water standards, including the application of specific treatment techniques.

In California, the State Department of Public Health enforces the Safe Drinking Water Act for all large water systems (those with over 200 service connections). The small water systems are regulated by the local health departments. In California, the state and county health departments regulate approximately 12,450 public water systems, of which 11,000 are classified as small water systems.

What Is A Small Water System?

Under the California Safe Drinking Water Act of 1986, a public water system is defined as a system for providing water which has five or more service connections or regularly serves at least 25 people daily at least sixty days per year.

A small water system is a public water system which serves less than 200 service connections. Small water systems are further divided into four categories:

Small Community Systems - Serves 15-199 service connections

Local Small Systems - Serves 2-14 service connections

Noncommunity Systems - Serves at least 25 non-resident individuals at least 60 days a year

Non-transient Non-Community Systems - Serves at least the same 25 non-resident individuals at least 6 months per year

What Are The Basic Requirements For The Operation Of A Small Water System?

1. Possess a valid water supply permit from the local health department.
2. Provide safe, wholesome and potable water to the consumers, in adequate quantities, at adequate pressures, at all times.
3. Provide an approved emergency notification plan to be implemented in the event of an immediate threat to the health of the water users.
4. Perform the required monitoring and reporting of water quality as specified by state regulations.

5. Maintain a cross connection control program to prevent backflow of contaminated water into the drinking water supply.
6. Notify the public whenever a water quality standard or monitoring requirement is violated.

What Happens If The Monitoring Is Not Performed Or If The Water Quality Does Not Meet Standards?

When a drinking water regulation is violated, the public must be notified. The notices to the public must:

1. Explain the nature of the violation.
2. Provide a balanced explanation of the potential adverse health effects.
3. Describe the population at risk.
4. Be multilingual if appropriate.
5. Report the results of any additional monitoring or sampling.
6. Include an explanation and schedule of corrective action taken or to be taken.
7. Be free of unduly technical language or small print.
8. Provide the phone number of the water supplier that the consumer can contact.

Some types of violations may require the notification to be carried by the news media.

Violations that represent an immediate threat to the health of the water users require emergency notification as provided for the Emergency Notification Plan that was submitted to the regulatory agency by each water system.

In addition, if a public water system violates a drinking water regulation, standard, permit or order, they may be subject to a citation or other legal action by the regulatory agency. Primary drinking water standard violations of a continuing nature may be subject to a fine of up to \$25,000 per day. Any person who knowingly falsifies, withholds, or destroys water system records, reports or documents may, upon conviction, be subject to a fine of \$25,000 per day or be imprisoned in the county jail for up to one year or both.

Water system operators have an obligation to be familiar with all the laws, regulations and standards pertaining to public water supplies. This handout is intended to provide small water system operators with only general information regarding these laws and regulations. For more information, copies of the laws and regulations, or to answer any questions raised by this handout, please call Environmental Health at (925) 692-2500.