



**THURSTON COUNTY**  
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# Small Public Water Systems

A Publication For Group B Public Water System Owners and Managers

March 2010

## Group B Annual Permit Update

Beginning July 1, 2009, an annual permit fee for small public water systems, also known as Group B public water systems, was implemented in Thurston County. The Board of Health chose to implement the annual permit fee after state funding for the program was eliminated in 2009. The \$95 permit is issued every July 1st and expires June 30th. The permit renewal reminders will be mailed to water system managers or owners on June 1st.

Drinking Water Program staff are currently evaluating our Group B program, water system records and updating our tracking database. The task to review over 500 files took longer than predicted but should be completed within the next month. Our next task under the new program is to conduct a follow-up review on those systems that need additional assistance to protect public health and be in compliance with the regulations.

For more information or if you have questions regarding the status of your water system, contact the Environmental Health Drinking Water Program staff listed in this newsletter.

## Is Your Water System Information Current?

Thurston County Drinking Water Program staff strives to keep its water system records up-to-date. Please let us know if there is a new owner or manager name, new phone number, or new mailing address. This is important if we need to contact you in case of an emergency, help resolve water system problems, mail out information, or announce educational opportunities. It is also important to keep all the users of your water system updated in case they need to reach you in an emergency.

**To update your information please call or e-mail our Drinking Water Program staff** listed in this newsletter. You may also request a copy of your Water Facilities Information (WFI) form to correct and return. It is important to make all corrections directly on your exist-

ing WFI form and not on a blank form. This makes changes readily seen by those who update the records.

**And don't forget to keep your water quality testing up-to-date too.** Taking regularly scheduled water quality samples is one of the best ways to prevent waterborne illnesses for all the users of your water system.

Group B public water systems are required to test for coliform bacteria annually and nitrate every three years. For your convenience, Thurston County Environmental Health Laboratory is certified to run coliform and nitrate analysis on water samples. For more information, contact the water quality laboratory staff at 360-867-2631.

## How to Take a Coliform Water Sample

Often the Thurston County Health Department finds that poor water quality sample results are caused by a mistake made at the time the sample was collected rather than bad water quality. If you are responsible for taking water samples, we recommend that you collect your coliform samples using the following steps:

### Step One

Routine and repeat samples should be collected from sites throughout the distribution system in accordance with your Coliform Monitoring Plan. Choose a sample tap that represents the water in your distribution system. Avoid poor sample sites such as swivel faucets, hot and cold mixing faucets (with a single lever), leaky or spraying faucets, drinking fountains, janitorial sinks, frost-free hose bibs, and faucets below or near ground level.

### Step Two

Remove any attachments from the faucet, including aerators, screens, washers, hoses, and water filters. If you choose to disinfect the sample site prior to sample collection, be sure to thoroughly flush until all disinfectant is removed.

### Step Three

Turn on the cold water only and let it run with a steady stream for at least five minutes. Before collecting the sample, turn the water down to a thin stream (about the width of a pencil), then let the water run one minute. If the system is chlorinated, measure the chlorine residual and note the results on the lab slip. Water conservation tip: The flushed water may be saved in a bucket to be used later.

**Do not** rinse the bottle out. There may be some liquid or powder in the sample bottle to neutralize any chlorine that may be present. Do not rinse it out.

### Step Four

To avoid contamination while taking the sample, hold the bottle near the bottom with one hand, hold the top of the cap with the other, and then unscrew the cap.

**Do not** set the cap down, touch any part of the cap that touches the bottle, or let anything touch the rim of the bottle or the inside of the cap.

### Step Five

Hold the bottle under the stream of water, being careful not to let the bottle touch the sample tap. Fill the bottle to the neck or indicated fill line, but do not allow it to overflow. Remove the bottle from the water flow and replace the cap.

### Step Six

Complete the lab slip. If there was anything unusual about the sample collection, note it on the lab slip. Laboratory forms vary, but the following information is very important to complete:

- Water system ID number
- Water system name
- Collection date and time the sample was taken
- Type of sample (check ONLY ONE Type: Routine, Repeat, Raw, or For Information Only)
- Sample location (street address or other type of location identifier)
- System type (Group B)

### Step Seven

Secure the lab slip to the bottle with the rubber band. Deliver the sample to a certified lab or to a designated drop-off location for the lab as soon as possible. Lab analysis must begin within 30 hours of sample collection.

If you have questions about coliform sampling collection procedures, contact the Environmental Health Drinking Water Program staff listed on the front of this newsletter.

Source: DOH PUB #331-225

### Additional Resources

Thurston County Drinking Water Program:  
[www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehdw](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehdw)

WA Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water (DOH): [www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw)

## Water Rates: Paying for Drinking Water

### How do rates reflect the cost of water?

Ideally, water rates pay for all the costs of providing water from operating the water system and maintaining the facilities to replacing equipment and adding new facilities in the future. Just like an automobile, a water system starts wearing out the day it is turned on. Water systems should price water to reflect the true cost of providing safe and reliable drinking water to customers now and in the future. Accurate pricing will also help avoid large rate increases in the future. Rates should be fair to customers so that each customer pays their share. Water systems can also use rates to promote water use efficiency.

### What do water rates cover?

It is essential for a water system to set rates so that they recover the full cost of producing and distributing water to customers. Revenues, including what customers pay for water, should meet or exceed the expenses generated by a water system. Excess revenue is saved for future improvements and unexpected emergencies. Expenses may include:

- Water quality monitoring costs
- Chemicals and supplies
- Maintenance and repairs
- Electricity and other utilities
- Improvements and upgrades
- Debt payments
- Planning and engineering
- Operating and emergency reserves

- Salaries and benefits
- Insurance and bonds
- Professional services fees
- Office supplies

### What causes rates to increase?

In order to provide customers with a reliable and fairly priced supply of safe drinking water, a water system's rate structure must produce enough money to operate in a financially sound manner. Many factors can lead to increasing rates such as:

- Maintenance, repair, and replacement costs that increase with the age of a water system or its components
- New regulatory requirements
- Increased costs for water treatment due to contamination

### Why are regular reviews of budget and rates important?

It is critical that water systems ensure their revenues cover the true cost of doing business. When rates aren't increased periodically as expenses go up, water systems may need to raise rates dramatically to guarantee they can meet their needs. A significant rate hike is more difficult for customers to afford than small incremental annual increases.

Source: DOH PUB #331-327

## Financial Viability Resources

### Free Tools

Rural Community Assistance Corporation has free *Financial Viability Software* available online at: [www.rcac.org/doc.aspx?163](http://www.rcac.org/doc.aspx?163)

The Public Works Board has a *Financial Capacity Assessment Spreadsheet* available online at: [www.pwb.wa.gov/financial\\_capacity.htm](http://www.pwb.wa.gov/financial_capacity.htm)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers a Check Up Program for Small Systems (CUPSS). A free, easy-to-use, asset management tool for small drinking water and wastewater utilities, CUPSS is online at: [www.epa.gov/cupss](http://www.epa.gov/cupss)

The following publications are online at: [www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw)

*Small Water System Management Program (SWSMP) Guide* (DOH PUB #331-134)

*Funding for drinking water capital improvement projects* (DOH PUB #331-344)

*Water Rates: Paying for drinking water* (DOH PUB #331-327)

*Setting Small Drinking Water System Rates for a Sustainable Future* (EPA 816-R-05-006)



## Comments or Suggestions?

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information on how to properly operate your water system. Well trained and educated water system operators and managers are much better equipped to deal with the day-to-day demands of running a water system, and react appropriately in the face of an emergency.

We appreciate your feedback and are

interested in learning what topics you would like to see in this newsletter.

Please contact any of the Drinking Water staff by phone or e-mail with your comments. Staff contact information is on the front of this newsletter or at our website:

[www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehdw](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehdw).

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**Thurston County Public Health and Social Services**  
*Always working for a safer and healthier community*

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