

Group B Water Supply Annual Permit Renewal

The Group B water supply annual permit for the next operating year is due July 1, 2014. A billing invoice for \$105 will be mailed to each water system the first week of June, 2014. If you do not receive the invoice by July, contact Drinking Water staff by phone or email to make sure the water systems contact information is current. Staff contact information is on the front of this newsletter. We will update the water systems information and resend the invoice.

The permit must be renewed annually to remain in compliance with regulatory requirements. If you do not have a Group B Water Supply Annual Permit your water system is considered out of compliance. This may result in denial of home loans, building permits, on-site sewage system permits, or other permits for properties served by the water system. To return to compliance status,

the water system must pay current and any past permit renewal fees and may be required to apply for a sanitary survey.

Questions? Contact any of the Drinking Water staff by phone or email. Staff contact information is on the front of this newsletter.

Reminder: Group B public water systems are required to test for coliform bacteria once a year and nitrates every three years.

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

**Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department
Environmental Health Division
2000 Lakeridge Dr SW
Olympia WA 98502-6045**



**Public Health & Social Services Department,
Environmental Health Division**

Drinking Water Program Staff

Program Supervisor

Erik Iverson
360-867-2631
iversoe@co.thurston.wa.us

Environmental Health Specialists

Sara Brallier
360-867-2629
brallis@co.thurston.wa.us

Phil Brinker
360-867-2630
brinkep@co.thurston.wa.us

General Drinking Water or Permit Questions
360-867-2673

Water Quality Lab
360-867-2631

TDD 360-867-2603

Website
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehadm

Small Public Water Systems

A Publication For Group B Public Water System Owners and Managers

March 2014

New Rule Effective January 1, 2014

Background

The Department of Health shares regulatory responsibility of Group B systems with Local Health Jurisdictions (LHJs). An agreement called a "Joint Plan of Responsibility" lays out the roles and responsibilities between the LHJ and the Department of Health. In some counties, the LHJ has primary oversight responsibility; in others, the department retains primary oversight responsibility. For Thurston County, the agreement with the Department of Health gives primary oversight responsibility for Group B system to the county.

Group B systems serve fewer than 15 connections and fewer than 25 people per day that typically include:

- Small subdivisions
- Home-based businesses
- Campgrounds
- Community facilities
- Churches

Legislative Change – New Direction for Rule

The State Board of Health was working on the Group B rule revision when, in 2009, the Governor and the Legislature set a new direction for regulating Group B systems. The Governor and Legislature eliminated funding for Group B oversight. The change in the law recognized the challenge in regulating the large number of Group B systems in Washington. At the request of the State Board of Health, the Department of Health worked with stakeholders and local health jurisdictions to revise the Group B rule (chapter 246-291 WAC) that recognized these challenges. After holding several public hearings, the State Board of Health adopted the new rule effective on January 1, 2014. After working with stakeholders and eliciting comments from the public, Thurston County Board of Health adopted revisions to Article III to align the local drinking ordinance governing water supplies in Thurston County with the new Group B rule.

Key Changes in the New Rule

- Establishes minimum water system design requirements for new or expanding Group B systems and requires all designs submitted for approval must be designed by a professional engineer
- Requires new or expanding Group B systems designed to serve between 10 and 14 service connections to meet planning, engineering and design requirements of the Group A rule
- Establishes minimum standards for existing Group B systems to ensure they continue to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water
- Requires new or expanding systems to use a drilled well for the systems water source where surface water and groundwater under the influence of surface water (GWI) sources are no longer approvable as a source of supply

New Rule Effective January 1, 2014 (continued)

- Exempts one- and two-connection systems from all requirements, except where the LHI or Department of Health determines requirements are necessary to protect public health and safety
- Provides clear authority for LHJs to adopt requirements that are more stringent than the state rule, including the adoption of ongoing water quality monitoring requirements
- New reporting standards for water quality violations that require faster notification to customers

To view a summary of all changes to the new Group B rule, visit the Department of Health publications web page at http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/4200/groupb_summary.pdf.

To view the newly adopted Article III Sanitary Code, visit the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Environmental Health Division web page at http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehadm/rules_regs.html.

Questions? Drinking Water staff contact information is on the front of this newsletter.

New Resources Available

As an operator of a Group B water system, you have the responsibility to your consumers to provide a continuous supply of safe drinking water. Meeting your responsibilities may include sampling and resolving problems, responding to emergencies, and conducting routine maintenance. The Department of Health has developed a new webpage just for Group B system operators to help them be successful in maintaining a safe and reliable drinking water supply. The web page includes such helpful resources as:

- Operations and maintenance guides
- Cross connection control and the risks of contamination from cross-connections
- Water quality sampling techniques and how to troubleshoot water quality problems when they occur
- Taking action during an emergency
- Links to other national organizations that have developed useful guidance documents

To access these helpful resources, visit the Department of Health publications web page at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/DrinkingWater/WaterSystemAssistance/GroupB.aspx>

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Water Quality Test Reminder

Although the Department of Health webpage implies ongoing water quality monitoring is no longer required under the new Group B rule, this is not the case for Group B water systems operating in Thurston County. The requirement for ongoing water quality monitoring is still required to remain in compliance with the newly adopted Article III of the Thurston County Sanitary Code. The required ongoing water quality monitoring tests is at least once a year for coliform bacteria and at least once every three years nitrates.

When you miss the sample collection dates or fail to sample at all, you put users of your water system at risk for waterborne illnesses. As an owner or manager of a water system, you are responsible if someone gets sick from waterborne pathogens or elevated nitrates found in your system. Meeting these important rules for running your water system also will help you to avoid possible legal action.

Periodic water quality monitoring is also an indicator of potential operational problems. Troubleshooting water quality problems when they occur can help you maintain a safe drinking water supply.

Stewards of our Water Supply

The safety of your water supply depends on your friends and neighbors. Don't believe it? Think about where your water comes from and what things may impact that water.

Most Group B water systems receive their water supply from a well that taps into groundwater. That groundwater originates from a radius of about 500 feet that encircles the well.

For the most part, you are drinking rainwater that has percolated through the soils around your immediate neighborhood. To prevent source of contamination directly impacting your well water, regulations require a 100 foot non-pollution radius around the well.

Take a look around your well. Do you see anything happening that could harm your water quality? Do neighbors over-apply fertilizers or pesticides? Are automobile repairs taking place? Are there many large animals kept in this area? These activities and others have potential impact to your water quality.

Water system managers need to communicate water quality risks to their customers and have them actively participate in protecting their water supply.

For additional information about protecting your water supply visit the following web pages:

- <http://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/Documents/pubs/331-453.pdf>
- <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehdw/pdf/PreventingPestContam.pdf>
- <http://www.watersystemscouncil.org/infoSheets.php>
- water.epa.gov/infrastructure/drinkingwater/sourcewater/protection/whatyoucando.cfm

(excerpts from "Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Group B Water Systems Newsletter")

Rainfall vs. Unsatisfactory Bacteria Test Results

Throughout the year about 3 percent of the Group B water systems report the presence of bacteria in their water supply. Bacteria can enter into the water for many reasons, including cross contamination while taking samples, holes in the top of the well casing, and poor animal keeping practices.

Over the last several years, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department has recorded monthly test results that show bacteria. They compared that data to monthly rainfall data. Through very preliminary examination, they have observed a correlation between the amount of rainfall and the number of water systems failing monthly water quality tests. The Pacific Northwest also experienced record rainfalls during the month of March. This resulted in an increase in the number of water systems experiencing failing water quality tests, such as elevated bacteria or cloudy water.

With that in mind, examine your water well for possible sites where rainfall runoff may be entering into or around your well casing, or rainfall is infiltrating through areas where a large number of bacteria are present such as animal enclosures or near a failing septic system.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce bacteria levels:

- Divert any over-land flows away from your wellhead
- Maintain proper handling of animal manure
- Get your on-site septic system inspected regularly
- Take water samples without rain or runoff interfering when filling the sample bottle

Use these precautions to help maintain good water quality—and not fail the water quality tests.

(excerpts from "Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Group B Water Systems Newsletter")