

Summer 2015

# Service Connection: The Maine Drinking Water Program Newsletter, Volume 23, Issue 2 (Summer 2015)

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Maine Department of Health and Human Services

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# Service Connection

The Maine Drinking Water Program Newsletter

*"Working Together for Safe Drinking Water"*

Summer 2015 ■ Volume 23, Issue 2



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## Contract Operations of Public Water Systems: Does Your Contract Have you Covered?

*Nathan Saunders, Field Inspection Team Leader*



As part of the 1996 amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act, Congress required states to adopt laws and rules requiring certain public water systems to be placed under the responsible charge of an appropriately licensed water operator(s). This requirement helps ensure that safe water is provided to consumers. In support of this public health directive, the Drinking Water Program is responsible for overseeing those public water systems (PWS) required to be operated by appropriately licensed operators.

The PWS owner and licensed water operator share the responsibility for providing safe water. However, it is the licensed operator who makes all decisions affecting water quality and quantity, regardless of whether the operator is an employee of the PWS or a contractor hired by the PWS. Unfortunately, in some cases where the licensed operator is a contractor, the owner fails to appropriately notify the licensed operator of an issue at the water system. This has resulted in situations where the licensed operator is not properly overseeing the operation of the water system.

Enter the challenging world of contract PWS operations, finance and public health. The reality is, whenever a water quality or quantity decision is needed at a PWS, the owner must involve the contract operator. Because of the resulting cost, an owner may be hesitant to involve the licensed operator in all quality and quantity decisions. For example, the DWP recently discovered a contract that only covered the contract operator sampling four times per year, with no provisions for the contract operator to address any of the other operator responsibilities. This situation was discovered while the DWP was working with a PWS to resolve a Boil Water Order. Despite the costs associated with contract operations, the frequency of contract operator involvement should never be lowered to the point where the protective value of the licensed water operator system is diminished.

When DWP staff, (usually field inspectors) determine that a licensed operator is not sufficiently overseeing the water system, they will issue a

## Who should be signing Monthly Operating Reports (MORs)?

All systems that add chemicals on a continuous basis must submit a monthly operating report (MOR) every month that the public water system is in operation. Reports must be submitted by the 10th day of the following month. A frequent question is, "who signs the monthly report?" The Rules Relating to Drinking Water (section 6) states, "If a Designated Operator (DO) is required at a public water system that submits monthly operating reports, then that Designated Operator is required to sign all monthly reports." This requirement means that all community, non-transient non community and transient systems utilizing surface water must have their DO sign the MOR. MORs can be mailed, faxed, scanned or attached to an email to [dwpmor@maine.gov](mailto:dwpmor@maine.gov). If a scanner is not available, then the MOR may be attached to an email and sent by the DO. We will use the email as proof that the DO has reviewed the MOR (versus a signature).



Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

An Office of the Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

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# DIRECTOR'S *Corner*

## Hinges

Greetings from Augusta. I hope you have been able to enjoy the short but wonderful time of summer in Maine. For those who depend heavily upon the summer season for financial security, I hope your summer is prosperous.

It has been said that “the gates of history swing on small hinges.” Each day, we make a myriad of decisions that may seem minor, simple or inconsequential at the time, but, in reality, may be pivotal moments in our lives or the lives of those around us.

In Maine, we are fortunate to have an abundance of fresh water in almost all areas of the State. Most of this water is clean and requires little or no treatment to be deemed “safe to drink.” However, the consistent and reliable delivery of safe drinking water to your customers can be affected, for good or bad, by seemingly simple actions.

Reports of illness due to the consumption of water from public water systems are very rare. Yet we know that there are plenty of pathogenic organisms in our environment as well as numerous natural and man-made chemicals that if consumed would be detrimental to our health. Although there are many significant and monumental decisions that have influenced the safety of our drinking water, on a daily basis, there are small decisions which will reduce the risk of unsafe drinking water.

### *Examples of some of these decisions include:*

- Will I decided to let cars and other machinery be parked near my well?
- Will I ensure that hazardous chemicals are not stored in or around my pump/well house even though it is a convenient location?

*continued on next page...*



## Service Connection

The Maine Drinking Water Program Newsletter

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*'Director's Corner' continued from page 2...*

- Will I make daily or routine checks on my chemical feed pump or other treatment system components to ensure they are working properly?
- Will I decide to take the time to check the integrity of the vent screen on my tank or well?
- Will I buy sufficient quantities of treatment chemicals to ensure that I do not run out?

How many illnesses will be prevented because the right decisions are made? The answer may never be known, but what the future looks like for you and your water system hinges upon the decision you make each day.

If you need any help understanding what decisions you should make to keep your water safe, please contact one of our staff at the Drinking Water Program for help.

Yours for safe drinking water,

*Roger*

### Attention Public Water Systems in Cumberland and York Counties

Due to the continued vacancy of the Drinking Water Program (DWP) compliance officer position responsible for Cumberland and York Counties, the DWP has temporarily assigned these 412 public water systems to the remaining four compliance officers responsible for all other public water systems in Maine until the vacancy can be filled.

This allocation occurred, strictly according to where a public water system's name appears in the alphabet. As a result, each compliance officer now oversees an additional 103 public water systems from Cumberland and York Counties. If your PWS is located in either of these Counties, the following guide describes which compliance officer is responsible for which PWS's:

Jeremiah Haws (287-8402) – **A to Elwell Farms**

Jennifer Grant (287-3962) – **Estes Lake Mobile Home Park to MIGIS Lodge**

Darren Brann (287-5545) – **Mildred Day School to Sandys on Long Lake**

Jason Pushard (287-8487) – **Sanford Country Club to York Water District**



### Important Information Regarding Sample Hold Times

*Carlton Gardner, Compliance Team Leader*

Compliance samples must be analyzed within a certain period of time after collection. This requirement is referred to as the "sample hold time."

Here are a few of the most common sample hold time requirements: For total coliform bacteria samples, the sample analysis must be started within 30 hours of collection. It is extremely important to check with your delivery service to ensure that your bacteria samples are collected and dropped off before the delivery service goes out for the day. Most nitrate and nitrite samples need to be analyzed within 48 hours of collection, as do asbestos samples and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Lead and copper samples need to be at your laboratory and acidified within 14 days. Always check with your certified laboratory and follow their instructions. If you have questions about any hold time requirements, please contact your certified laboratory.

#### Additional Reminders:

- 1) If you chlorinate, remember to check your chlorine residual and write it on the laboratory reporting form.
- 2) Always include your PWS name and Public Water System ID (PWSID) on the laboratory reporting form. Make sure your lab knows the sample is for compliance, and that the results must be sent directly to the Drinking Water Program..



### 2015 Water Loss Control Program Grant

*Norm Lamie, Assistant Director and Chief Engineer*

With the goal of enhancing the financial and operational capacity of public water systems, the Maine Drinking Water Program is implementing a program to assist water systems with a set of tools and approaches to enhance accountability and control water losses.

Public water systems face a number of challenges, including aging infrastructure, increasing regulatory requirements, water quantity and quality concerns and inadequate resources. A water loss control program can help water systems meet these challenges. Although it requires an investment in time and financial resources, management of water loss can be cost effective, if properly implemented. A water loss control program will also help protect public health through reduction in potential entry points for disease-causing pathogens.

Water audits are the first step in a three-step process for controlling water loss. This step is intended to include:

- Gathering available information
- Determining flows into and out of the distribution system based on estimates or metering
- Calculating the performance indicators.
- Assessing where water losses appear to be occurring based on available metering and estimates
- Analyzing data gaps
- Considering options and making economic and benefit comparisons of potential actions
- Recommending the appropriate interventions.

Following a water audit, an intervention is done to identify losses and implement solutions. The third step is an evaluation of intervention measures and needs for further improvement.

All community public water systems regulated by the Maine Public Utilities Commission are eligible for funding assistance to complete a water audit. Funding assistance comes in the form of a DWRSF grant for 75% of the cost of the water audit up to a maximum grant amount of \$4,000. Grants are awarded on a reimbursement basis after the Water Audit Report is submitted to the Drinking Water Program (DWP) for approval and acceptance.



*Photo credit: EPA*

Awards will be made on a first-come first-served basis meeting program requirements. Priority is given to any public water system with a calculated population under 10,000 and with non-revenue water greater or equal to 25%, as reported by the utility in its 2014 PUC Annual Report, Page W-12, Line 19.

**Which public water systems are eligible?** All community public water systems regulated by the Maine Public Utilities Commission are eligible for funding assistance to complete a water audit.

**How much money will be awarded?** The DWP has set aside \$100,000 for the 2015 grant program.

**Who can prepare the document?** A Water Audit Report Grant recipient may negotiate with professional engineering or consulting services of their choice for a proposal to produce the document. The report shall be completed and submitted in a pdf format to the DWP by December 31, 2015.

**How can I get more information?** Contact Norm Lamie at (207) 287-2647 or e-mail [norm.lamie@maine.gov](mailto:norm.lamie@maine.gov).

### *Continued from cover...*

Management and Operations Notice of Non-compliance, to notify the PWS that it has violated the Operator Rule. A complaint against the operator may also be filed with the Board of Licensure of Water System Operators, in cases where the field inspector determines that the operator knowingly chose to be excluded from decisions affecting water quality and quantity.

If you are a contract operator or if you are a PWS owner who hired a contract operator, follow these basic steps to ensure that the public water system remains in compliance and there is no action taken against the water operator's license:

- Create a signed agreement that clearly identifies roles and responsibilities;
- Ensure that you and the other party abide by the terms of the contract; and
- Be prepared to terminate the agreement, should the other party not fulfill their responsibilities.

For any questions regarding this topic, please contact the DWP.



## ENFORCEMENT CORNER

*Tera Pare, Enforcement and Rulemaking Coordinator*



### ***Avoid These Common Mistakes***

If a public water system (PWS) incurs serious and/or multiple drinking water violations, the possibility of formal enforcement action at the Drinking Water Program (DWP) is high. How does this happen? DWP staff work with PWS owners, operators, and managers to understand and follow requirements. However, despite these efforts, a PWS could still end up with administrative orders, being required to submit additional reports to enforcement staff and/or pay hefty fines, or even appear in court and be subject to court orders and civil fines. Is this path inevitable? The good news is that the answer is No. Follow these guidelines to help stay out of enforcement.

**1. Don't Guess What the DWP Means:** We all have the best of intentions and an independent, can-do spirit in Maine: an admirable attitude; however, when the DWP explains specific drinking water requirements, and you are not sure what they mean, ASK! We genuinely want you to understand these requirements, so that you follow them correctly. Too often, misunderstandings result in greater costs, re-work, more tests and wasted time. Please call your compliance officer or field inspector with any questions. There are no stupid questions. We mean it!

**2. Don't Bury or Avoid DWP Paperwork and Emails:** Whether it's a sanitary survey report, an engineering order, a violation letter (called a Notice of Noncompliance), an administrative order or any other letter or email, a PWS is only doing itself a disservice with the mindset:

"I'll just look at that later," or "I'll have time to get back to that another time." Running a public water system, in addition to all other commitments within a day, is a demanding task, and the urge to set things aside is tempting. Sometimes, it can't wait, which leaves the PWS at a considerable disadvantage when time runs out and the case gets referred to Enforcement. Burying your head in the sand means getting buried in administrative orders, letters, emails and fines that could have been avoided altogether, by being proactive earlier on in the process.

**3. Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep:** The DWP understands that unexpected events happen that prevent a PWS from meeting a drinking water requirement agreed upon by the PWS. In fact, we will try our best to adjust deadlines whenever it's reasonable and feasible, particularly when the circumstances are beyond PWS control. However, that willingness does not mean that if a PWS owner, operator, consultant or manager knows that it cannot comply with a requirement that he or she should tell us what we want to hear. Perhaps it is wishful thinking or fear of sharing the truth, but this practice only leads to frustration and quicker enforcement when those deadlines and agreements are broken, leaving the DWP with no choice but to escalate enforcement, leading to fines.

Public Water Systems who avoid compliance requirements, guess or act inappropriately are guaranteed to land in Enforcement faster, costing them valuable time and money that could have been avoided. So please contact the DWP early and often to avoid these mistakes!

### Summer Reminders for Water Operators

*Teresa Trott, Licensing Officer*



Long hot days, construction season, summer storms, high water use... not really the slow season is it? Here are four reminders to help make a calm successful summer:

**SOPs and Emergency Response Plans** – make sure they are in order and readily available. This organizational effort will ease the tense moments so you can enjoy some down time.

**Sampling Site plans** – Use this summer to review and check your sampling site plan. Sampling site plans should be reviewed and updated by March 31, 2016. Systems with a population greater than 1,000 need to submit a revised copy for use with the Revised Total Coliform Rule (RTCR) by Dec. 31, 2015.

**Security** – Check and double check structural security like fences, tanks and stations as well as your cyber security. Keep antiviral software up to date. Also, be sure your customers are reminded of cross-connection dangers. Hoses left submerged in pools, pesticide applicators attached to hoses or simply keeping a hose lying in the summer sun can build pressure and cause a backflow event.

**Safety** – work safe, don't take shortcuts, and keep up on training. Providers continue to offer training in the summer and are planning fall courses. If you have ideas or needs for specific topics contact a training provider and make suggestions. Check the DWP training webpage for available training.

### Revised Total Coliform Rule (RTCR): Seasonal Systems

The RTCR goes into effect April 1, 2016 and has certain requirements for seasonal systems. A seasonal system is one that does not operate year-round and includes non-community systems that de-water portions of the system, like a campground connected to a year-round motel.

**Startup Plans:** The RTCR requires all seasonal public water systems to have a written plan to startup their water system. The plan must be approved by DWP. At the beginning of each operating season, seasonal public water systems will be required to certify that they have followed their approved water system startup plan. The DWP has developed a model startup procedure to help guide systems which is available on the DWP website (see the new Revised Total Coliform Rule page).

**Sampling Frequency:** Most of Maine's seasonal systems test on a quarterly basis at the present time. This frequency will be reviewed, and, according to site-specific system characteristics and total coliform water quality history, may be increased to monthly or remain the same.

It is very important for public water systems to carefully collect samples on time. Use this year to check your well and water system for necessary repairs to assure sanitary integrity. Further information about the Revised Total Coliform Rule will be mailed directly to each system and can be found on DWP's new RTCR webpage.



*US Forest Service photo by Susan Blake*



## What's in that Algae Bloom?

*Teresa Trott, Licensing Officer*

We've seen it before, green scum floating in ponds and lakes, water that is so cloudy you cannot see through it. Hopefully, this is not the case with surface water supplies used as drinking water sources, but it can happen. Cyanobacteria, formerly known as blue-green algae, are becoming a health threat in many areas around the world. Historically, these organisms have been known for taste and odor compounds; toxicity is not related to taste and odor compounds. These bacteria are very efficient organisms that use the nutrients in the lake and from runoff as food sources. Just as their marine relatives produce toxins we call Red Tide, the fresh water species can also produce toxins. These blooms have come to be known as harmful algal blooms or HABs. Not all blooms are toxic. Scientists have not determined what triggers a bloom to produce toxins. However, toxic blooms are becoming a more widespread problem in temperate areas.

Several types of toxins may be produced and can affect the nervous system, liver or skin. Toxins can affect people, animals and even other algae through a variety of pathways. Although recreational use of waters experiencing blooms is not advised, this article is focused on drinking water contamination. EPA recently issued non-regulatory health advisories (HA) for drinking water for two of the cyanobacteria toxins, microcystin and cylindrospermopsin. The levels are set for short term, 10-



*Cyanobacteria bloom at Grand Lake St. Marys, Ohio, 2010.  
Photo by Ohio EPA.*

day exposure. A value is set for each toxin for pre-school age children, (due to their higher susceptibility) and for school-age children and adults, based on the consumption of water relative to body weight. Suggested monitoring and other actions for water systems to minimize toxins in the finished water, as well as public communication advice, are addressed in the advisory.

More information may be found on EPA's website.  
[http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-06/documents/cyanotoxins-fact\\_sheet-2015.pdf](http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-06/documents/cyanotoxins-fact_sheet-2015.pdf).

## How You Operate Your Wells Can Affect Your Sampling Requirements

*Carlton Gardner, Compliance Team Leader*

Many Public Water Systems use multiple wells that add water to the distribution system at different locations. Each one of these wells used will require sampling. These requirements can get complicated when there are multiple wells entering the system at one location. If all wells enter at one location, (often called a manifold), and always operate simultaneously, then one set of sampling schedules is required. If the multiple wells alternate, come on progressively or the wells are operated on a time schedule, then the wells should have individual well sampling schedules. Individual well schedules could mean additional sampling costs. If there are questions about how your wells are operated, you may get a call from your compliance officer. A review of your well operations will come up at the next sanitary survey conducted by your field inspector. If you have questions, please contact your field inspector or your compliance officer.





## Service Connection

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