

Meeting Minutes

Drinking Water Advisory Group Monday, April 29, 2013

Location: Kent, WA with videoconference to DOH office in Spokane
Time: 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

1. Denise Clifford: **What is the Drinking Water Advisory Group?**

Wants feedback—and learn from discussions how our actions, policies, rules, and fees impact them.

- Get together with folks that are involved directly with water systems.
- Share ideas that are important to those in the water business.
- Provide updates on what we're doing.
- Have transparent discussion among water interests.

We are looking to make improvements on format, including adding venues, such as Local Health Jurisdictions to videoconference, providing telephone call-in option, or webinar.

2. Denise Clifford: **Introduce New Management Team**

- Heather Bartlett, Deputy Director for Field Operations
- Dan Alexanian, Deputy Director for Headquarters
- Joe Crossland, Manager of Budget and Performance Accountability

Comment: Could we put the org chart up on the website? (Response: Yes, we will.)

Here's the new link to our [org chart](#).

3. Denise: **Emerging Issues**

- Continual reduction in state general funding to our program.
- We are planning for a five percent reduction in funding from EPA from the sequester. The impact of funding losses so far was offset with increased operating permit fee revenue.
- We are learning that some hospitals are taking actions that make them public water systems: either treating water to prevent Legionnaires' disease, or developing redundant and emergency water supplies.
- Our data system (Sentry) is getting antiquated and we are preparing to transition to EPA's national data system (Safe Drinking Water Information System-Next Gen). Staff members are working with EPA to assure the new system meets our needs.

- EPA has a new enforcement policy. We've been in negotiations with EPA to continue our successful approach with some changes.
- We have completed our Office of Drinking Water (ODW) Strategic Plan, which includes many of the issues we are talking about today.
- There's a big focus in state government to use Lean techniques for quality improvement, which we've already done with our Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program.
- We'll be seeking feedback on how to improve programs, including our satellite management program that we will be evaluating later this year.

4. Dave Christensen: **Legislative, Rule, and Policy Updates**

A. Legislative update

- 50 bills analyzed by ODW; 15 significant bills tracked by DOH; only one passed.
- The bill that passed (FirePals) was supported by the department, and now is on the Governor's desk for signature.
- One other bill sponsored by the PUD Association that DOH supported died in the House after passage by the Senate.
- There is a legislative proposal to permanently divert money from the Public Works Assistance Account to fund education to meet Supreme Court obligations (the "McCleary decision").

Questions/Comments: Did DOH have concerns with the bill regarding geothermal wells and the potential impact on public water systems? (Response: No.)

Is the department addressing the planning cycle requirement by changing the current every six-year submittal requirement to every ten years? (Response: No, to be discussed later.)

B. Rule updates

- *Group B rule* adopted in October 2012, and will be effective in January 2014.
- Operator certification rule should have a public hearing this summer and be effective later this year.
- *Revised Total Coliform rule* was published by the EPA early 2013; there will be a State Board of Health meeting in June; CR-101 filing after that. We plan to invite questions and comments at Drinking Water Advisory Group meetings this summer and fall about the items in which EPA allowed states discretion.
- We are starting to evaluate our program and rules and will be coming back to ask what's working well and what isn't working well for you. [What are your initial thoughts?](#)

Comments: Sanitary survey program is working well.

What's not working well:

- Sanitary survey fees vary between DOH and some counties.
- Planning program with its requirements for updates every six years.
- Small Water System Management Program.
- New Group B rule and the negative impact on SMAs that manage systems in multiple counties with various approaches.
- Placing more responsibilities on operators when water system boards do not provide adequate funding to fix problems.

C. Policy updates

- We will be updating existing policies and developing new policies over the next couple of months on:
 - [Alternate water supplies](#)
 - Rainwater catchments
 - Sanitary survey fee clarification
- We will share drafts at the DWAG and get feedback.

5. Denise Clifford: **Priorities identified by our new Secretary of Health, John Wiesman:**

- Emergency response
- Patient safety
- Public health reform and public health care
- Agenda for change
- Childhood obesity
- Climate change

6. Leslie Gates: **Communications in 2013 and beyond...**

- We aren't printing documents, notifications, publications or Water Tap anymore.
- Electronic communications have significant benefits but also challenges (for example, e-mail follows the individual, not the organization, so it's hard to track staff changes).
- Need to find ways to reach people effectively and maintain contacts.
- Investigating electronic form submittal.
- Expanding our use of surveys.
- We have a redesigned website. Our agency is addressing known search engine issues.
- We are building web links into electronic publications.
- Our fact sheets will be designed as web pages with printable versions for field work.
- We've thought of video tech tips, searchable archives for Water Tap, Twitter feeds, webinars, and other forms of social media. Which would you use?
Show of hands showed strong preference for ODW using visual learning tools such as webinars and video tech tips, some support for online professional networking tools such as LinkedIn, little to no support for social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, or Google+.
- Seeking [feedback](#) on electronic communications.

Comments: Consider other tools such as QR codes, texting (such as during an emergency) Sentry access on smart phones electronic forms and putting the Small Water System Management Program manual and application online.

Here's the link for [Small Water System Management Program](#). The Guide document includes Word templates and Excel spreadsheets to help you complete your plan.

7. Denise Clifford: **Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) & the future of infrastructure funding**

- Background provided on [DWSRF](#).
- We've looked at how to make the process easier and faster.
- Challenges for us as we go forward: use of federal funds, streamlining cultural and archaeological process.
- Question: *What are the barriers?*

Feedback:

- Cultural & archaeological review is a real barrier.
- Loans can't be refinanced; we're locked into higher interest rate.
- PWB application is easier and simpler.

- *What about the timing for the DWSRF cycle? Should we have a fall round of DWSRF awards?*

Feedback:

- Support having two DWSRF rounds each year.
- Would be ok to not do workshops on how to apply for a fall round.

- *Do you have thoughts about if DOH did the contracting/financial administration?*
No Feedback

- *How do we improve our process for determining readiness to proceed?*

Feedback:

- Tough to get design completed without money in hand because we have to convince administration/elected leadership.
- Some permits expire quickly, so we need to wait until funding is secured before application is made.
- Should have a continuous process with ranking first, then use the ranking for getting a design approved, then use the design for getting construction dollars.
- Some projects are inherently complex and take time to complete.

- *Should we increase the cap (currently \$12M maximum per entity)*

Feedback: Most "no"; some "yes".

General Comments:

- Expensive for bonding: securing bond insurance, borrowing money.
- Support for online application that just asks basic information.
- Can state repayment money be made more easily available to smaller systems, with fewer strings attached? (Response: We will look into ways to make it easier.)
- Can federal dollars be directed to private systems? (Response: Yes, private, not-for-profits can receive federal dollars.)

8. Denise Clifford: Queuing up the next meeting

- Review Engineering Program: Appropriate Level of Engineering
- Total Coliform Rule – Input on discretionary items
- Evaluation of the Group A Rule: what’s working and what should we look to change

General Comments:

- I’ve heard that the SMA Program is not working, but would like to hear exactly what’s not working well and what’s broken. (Response: We’ll identify issues during an assessment.)
- Questions about electronic data keeping, and using electronic forms—need guidance on how we archive them.
- EPA is coming out with Q&A on Lead & Copper Rule changes in 2014 and I would like to be kept updated as changes are happening.
- Can this forum make a difference or influence decisions regarding fluoridation? (Response: No. Fluoridation is a local decision. Our role is to make sure systems that use fluoride meet regulatory requirements.)

9. Denise Clifford: How did this work for you today?

Many people said they liked today’s forum and were pleased ODW is providing an opportunity to meet and discuss topics.

Suggested improvements:

- Change format of the room so people can see each other.
- More sites and/or other ways to link in remotely.
- Crib sheets or informational packet before meeting so people know discussion topics.
- Have ideas listed as to what we want feedback on so audience can come prepared.