



# WaterTap

Washington's Drinking Water Newsletter

Volume 31, #1 - January 2016

## 2015 brings record number of health advisories

By Carolyn Cox, Public Information Coordinator

We are seeing a sharp increase in health advisories, and that might not be entirely bad news. There were 171 advisories in 2015. That is a significant increase from 2014, when there were 138 advisories—and 2014 was a record year.

Damage from wildfires, windstorms, and flooding helped drive up the health advisory numbers in 2014 and 2015, but they're not the biggest culprit. By far, outages caused by main breaks and other infrastructure failures led the way. But there's a hidden factor, too. More water systems are contacting us when they have emergencies!

Water infrastructure needs are expected to reach nearly \$10 billion over the next 20 years, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As our infrastructure ages, costs will continue to grow. This makes it all the more imperative that water systems stay on top of maintenance.

171 health advisories for 2015	
Outage or pressure loss	101
Coliform	36
Treatment technique failure	6
Nitrate	17
Inadequate disinfection	6
Other (mold, dead animals, etc.)	3
Turbidity	2
<b>Total Advisories</b>	<b>171</b>

## Are you water-ready for 2016?

The 2015 Washington State Drought Emergency officially ended December 31. Governor Inslee declared a limited drought last March and expanded it statewide in early May. That declaration expired at the end of the year. The drought was characterized by some of the most extreme water and weather conditions we've seen in the last 60 years.



What started as a warm winter turned into a record-setting hot, dry, and tenacious drought, which continued into the fall. Reservoirs and river levels were well below normal, and our expected September rains were nowhere to be seen.

On Halloween weekend, the rains returned with a vengeance. Even with warmer than normal temperatures, snow began to fall, rivers rose, and reservoirs filled. By early December, drought conditions in western Washington eased. In parts of eastern Washington, the drought lingered but snowpack was building in the Cascade Mountains and conditions across the state were improving.

Today, water resource managers across the state are looking at forecasts for the next 4 to 6 months with a watchful eye. Exceptionally warm temperatures drove the 2015 drought and the presence of a strong El Niño in the Pacific suggests another warmer and possibly drier than normal winter. While there are no forecasts that suggest a repeat of those extremes, there are challenges ahead.

**Celebrate  
Drinking Water Week  
May 3-9, 2016**

More info, including the award nomination form, is online at [doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater](http://doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater)

A word to the wise: Consider how your water system fared last year. Keep checking water levels, reviewing operations, checking your back-ups, and reminding your customers about wise water use. Be prepared for the possibility of another low-snow, no-snow year. If we learned anything from last year's drought, it's this: Do not underestimate how volatile weather can endanger your water supply or your operations.



DOH 331-200

# 2016 Legislative Session

By Clark Halvorson, Director

Legislative session is here, and we're prepared for another great year of discussions and opportunities to hear from the regulated community and our elected leaders. Topics this session will be:

## Regulating Group B Water Systems

This was a very active topic in 2015. I felt honored to discuss the negative impacts the Group B Rule has on some communities with Representative Shelly Short. She introduced a bill that would authorize county legislative authorities to approve certain Group B water systems (HB2061 - Short, Kretz). The bill passed out of the Environmental Committee but didn't make it through the full process, so I am sure we will continue these discussions.

## Consolidating the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program

Department of Health requested legislation last year to transfer public water system financial assistance activities from the Department of Commerce and the Public Works Board to us (SB5251 - Honeyford, Keiser) (HB1464 Hudgins, MacEwen, Senn, S. Hunt). We were grateful to get support from all of our partners! The Department of Commerce and the Public Works Board were there at every turn supporting the effort. We are optimistic that we will see the fruits of our labor in 2016, with savings of nearly \$900,000 we can put back into our funding for water systems.

## Leaking underground storage tanks

Russ Olsen, director of the Washington State Pollution Liability Insurance Agency (PLIA), has approval to move forward with legislation that's an incredible opportunity for our office and source water protection across the state. It will authorize us to work with PLIA to establish a revolving loan and grant program to assist owners and operators of underground petroleum storage-tank systems. We will support projects that remediate past releases; upgrade, replace, or remove underground petroleum storage-tank systems to prevent future releases; and install new infrastructure or retrofit existing infrastructure used to disperse renewable or alternative energy. This is a true win-win for all!

## Reclaimed water – Aquifer storage and recovery

Many communities across the state have reclaimed water projects underway or pilot projects in the works. A bill introduced last year supported underground storage and recovery projects (SB 5018 – Honeyford, Ericksen). As water quantity challenges grow, we expect continued interest in ways reclaimed water will fit into the solution.

This is a short list. I am sure that many new ideas will come up, as well as a few we thought we had put to bed. We are excited to work together as a public health community to help make the best decisions possible to support our shared mission of safe and reliable drinking water.



Clark Halvorson

## Holding certified operators accountable for poor performance

This year, we entered a new partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to investigate potential fraud, deceit, or criminal action by waterworks operators and backflow assembly testers. Special agents from the Inspector General's Office at EPA Region 10 will investigate cases upon referral.

### 2015 disciplinary actions

On September 30, the Department of Health revoked the backflow assembly tester certification of Jason Flannery (BAT BN5590) at Pure Flow Testing, LLC, in Redmond for five years. Flannery submitted false field test reports for an apartment complex with five backflow prevention assemblies. A cross-connection control specialist (CCS) visited the site a few days after the date on the reports and found four of the five assemblies completely buried under dirt that had not been disturbed. Another CCS gave investigators a police report from a car dealership alleging fraudulent backflow assembly testing by Flannery and Pure Flow Testing, LLC, and copies of invoices for assembly testing at a restaurant chain in Washington.

In July, we revoked the water treatment plant operator 1 certification of Jacob Peters (OC 012543) for five years. Peters had repeated noncompliance violations while running a seasonal surface water treatment facility.

# Lynden welcomes a new water treatment plant

The City of Lynden held an open house in October to celebrate completion of its new water treatment plant. The plant can treat 8 million gallons of water a day. It will provide a reliable water supply to Lynden and has capacity to serve water to at least six nearby systems with high nitrate levels.

Located north of Bellingham in Whatcom County, Lynden has drawn and treated water from the Nooksack River since about 1924. The original treatment plant went through several upgrades and expansions through the years. In 2006, city staff recognized the old plant was near its design capacity and life expectancy, and decided it was time to build a new treatment plant.

The multi-year process started with pilot studies to establish the design criteria and assess treatment alternatives. City staff piloted three membrane systems. In the end, they determined that the treatment process they have used for decades (flocculation, sedimentation, and filtration) is still the best option.

The new treatment plant sits next to the old plant and uses the same conventional treatment process—with some 21st century upgrades. It has a grit removal system, a more efficient sedimentation process, and two ultra violet reactors for primary disinfection. It also includes improved solids handling, like a sludge thickener and screw press, to better accommodate the high turbidity and sediment loads that occur in the Nooksack River.

The City of Lynden secured funding for this project from several sources, including the Public Works Trust Fund, Whatcom County Economic Investment Development Program, and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program.

Congratulations, City of Lynden!



*Lynden attributes its success to strong collaboration with the Office of Drinking Water. Shown are Tamara Adams, Lynden water and wastewater superintendent (second from left), with Northwest Regional Office members Nancy Feagin, Jolyn Leslie, and Bob James.*



*Odor. Taste. Clarity. The judges, from left, were Mike Pendergraft, ERWoW; Lori Bryson, General Pacific; and Don Zuern, City of Long Beach.*

The water district will attend the 2016 National Rural Water Rally in Washington, D.C. The rally includes the Great American Water Taste Test, where judges sample drinking water from around the nation to determine the year's best. The competitors will be winners of their state's taste-test competitions.

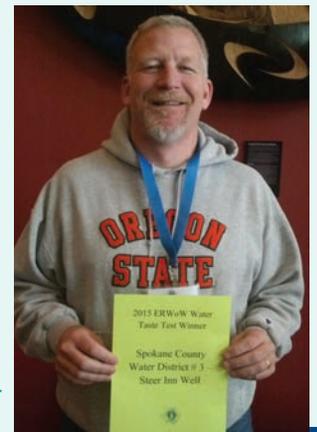
*Waterworks Operator Kelly Williquette is all smiles after winning the Annual Water Taste Test in September 2015.*

## Who has the best-tasting water in Washington?

### Spokane County Water District #3

Judges at Evergreen Rural Water of Washington's (ERWoW) fall conference searched for the best-tasting water in Washington.

After sipping samples from 17 water utilities located around the state, they selected the most delicious—a cold drink drawn from Spokane County Water District 3's Steer Inn well.



## Attention, owners, managers, and board members

### Set-up a 3-year training plan for your certified operators!

For most certified operators, a brand new professional-growth reporting period started this month. It's the perfect time to develop a three-year training plan for each of your employees. If you create a training plan now, you can maximize your training budget, ensure that your operators have the knowledge and skills they need to grow in their jobs, and develop some of the skills needed for your succession plan.

For best results, sit down with your operators and discuss the training they need. You should include classes to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities; training needed to meet the professional growth requirement; and other classes that are important to your utility.

Find out whether your operator could meet the requirement by passing a certification exam. You could save your education dollars for other training important to your water system. For example, your operator may need a class to meet a Labor and Industries' requirement that isn't relevant to drinking water.

If you think you might put off your training plan for a while, remember that your utility will fall out of compliance if your operator's certification gets inactivated for failing to meet the professional growth requirement. Imagine sending your water treatment plant operator 4 to a basic waterworks course at the last minute just because it's the only training available in your area before the deadline: It'd be a waste of the operator's time and your training dollars.

For more information about the waterworks professional growth requirement, visit Washington Certification Services online at [wacertservices.org](http://wacertservices.org).



## Lab Corner

### Review your lab slips and lab reports

- Before you submit your sample, is all the information on your lab slip correct?
- Do the results follow the “trend” of historical samples?
- Does your lab report include any data qualifiers, such as an estimated value? If so, contact the lab and our regional office. The lab can explain how the qualifier affects the results. Our source monitoring and coliform teams will decide whether the data with the qualifier is acceptable for compliance.



### The Lab Rule

Rulemaking for the Drinking Water Lab Certification and Data Reporting Rule (WAC 246-390) is temporarily on hold. Initial draft rule language and guidance is online at [doh.wa.gov/odwrulemaking](http://doh.wa.gov/odwrulemaking). Here are notable changes:

#### Labs

- The revised rule will require labs to mail reports to us within five business days after completing compliance sample analysis.
- Labs must also contact the water system and us by close of business on the day a sample tests positive for total coliform, *E. coli*, a nitrate or nitrite MCL exceedance, or any other contaminant that exceeds four times the primary MCL.

#### Lab templates

- There are minor analyte changes on some of the templates.
- Department of Ecology accredits laboratories by analyte and not by method, so ALL analytes listed on the templates must have an accreditation.
  1. To verify what analytes are on the current lab templates, visit [doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/DrinkingWater/Contaminants/LabTemplates](http://doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/DrinkingWater/Contaminants/LabTemplates).
  2. To verify whether a lab has accreditation for all the analytes on the test panel, visit the Department of Ecology at [ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/labs/index.html](http://ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/labs/index.html).

### Open now: Source Water Protection Program Grant up to \$30,000

Projects should result in long-term benefit to source water quality. Eligible applicants are local governments proposing a regional project and nonprofit Group A systems that complete one of the following:

- Source water susceptibility assessment.
- Watershed microbial risk rating.

See more information at [doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/DrinkingWater/SourceWater/LocalAssistanceGrantProgram](http://doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/DrinkingWater/SourceWater/LocalAssistanceGrantProgram).

# 2016 Funding Opportunities

## The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program



### January 4-29: Preconstruction Grant up to \$25,000

Publicly and privately owned not-for-profit Group A community and noncommunity water systems owned by nonprofit organizations serving fewer than 10,000 people are eligible to apply.

### February 1-29: Consolidation Grant up to \$30,000

Publicly and privately owned not-for-profit Group A community water systems are eligible to apply. The systems to be consolidated must be Group A water systems that serve fewer than 10,000 people.

### March 1-April 30: Preconstruction Loan up to \$300,000, 1.5 percent interest rate, 6-year term

Publicly and privately owned not-for-profit Group A community and noncommunity water systems owned by nonprofit organizations serving fewer than 10,000 people are eligible to apply.

### August 1-September 30: Construction Loans and Consolidation Loans

Publicly and privately owned Group A community and noncommunity water systems owned by nonprofit organizations can obtain construction loans to achieve compliance, mitigate a public health risk, or replace aging infrastructure. Consolidation loan applications are also available during this time.

### Emergency Loan (open cycle) up to \$100,000, 1.5 percent interest rate, 6-year term

Loans are available for unforeseen events, such as fires, floods, earthquakes, windstorms, or drought. Publicly and privately owned not-for-profit Group A community and noncommunity water systems owned by nonprofit organizations serving fewer than 10,000 people are eligible to apply. Based on the system's affordability index, an interest rate reduction to 1 percent or loan subsidy may be available.

As each application cycle approaches, we will post information about the application process on the DWSRF website at [doh.wa.gov/DWSRF](http://doh.wa.gov/DWSRF).

## Coming soon: The Revised Total Coliform Rule

April will be here before you know it and, with it, the federal Revised Total Coliform Rule (RTCR). We are busily preparing templates and guidance to help you transition to the new rule. Here are some things you need to know to prepare your system for the change.



### Review your Coliform Monitoring Plan

In response to a total coliform-present routine sample, RTCR requires water systems that collect one routine sample a month to collect three, and not four, repeat samples.

The month following a total coliform-present routine sample, RTCR no longer requires you to collect at least five routine samples. Instead, you collect your normal number of monthly samples.

### Seasonal water systems

RTCR recognizes a new type of noncommunity seasonal water system. A seasonal water system must shut down for one or more months, depressurize the water lines, and provide no water. Seasonal water systems must have a state-approved start-up plan by March 31, 2016. Our regional offices will send a letter about this requirement to potential seasonal water systems.

### Water system assessments

**Level 1:** A basic water system evaluation an owner, manager, or other knowledgeable person can do. Required when a water system that collects 40 or more routine samples has coliform-present results in more than 5 percent of the samples; a system that collects less than 40 routine samples has 2 or more coliform-present results; or a water system fails to collect 3 repeat samples for every coliform-present routine sample.

**Level 2:** A comprehensive evaluation only a professional engineer, a water distribution manager 2 (or higher), the Office of Drinking Water, or your local health department can do. Required when a water system has an *E. coli* MCL violation or a system experiences a second situation that would require a Level 1 assessment during a rolling 12-month period.



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**Did the 2015 drought  
affect your water system?**

Our March issue of *H<sub>2</sub>Ops* will feature lessons learned. If you have a story to share, please email us by February 5 at [watertap@doh.wa.gov](mailto:watertap@doh.wa.gov).



*Printed on recycled paper*

## Freeman grain facility on Superfund priority list

This year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency added the Grain Handling Facility at Freeman in Spokane County to the Superfund National Priorities List. The listing elevates the site for long-term evaluation and cleanup.

The soil beneath the property is contaminated with carbon tetrachloride and chloroform. The chemicals seeped into the groundwater, affecting the well that serves 900 students, teachers, and workers at the nearby Freeman School District. The school district installed a water treatment system to keep the school's water supply safe for drinking, but the long-term objective is to address the groundwater problem.

The Freeman School District continues to monitor the well and submit analytical results to us. The Department of Ecology is the regulatory lead for the cleanup.

The companies cited as possible sources of contamination, Union Pacific Railroad and Cenex Harvest States, chose not to participate in negotiations or sign an agreed order. Ecology proposed to issue an enforcement order requiring the companies to conduct a remedial investigation and feasibility study at the Grain Handling Facility.



The Office of Drinking Water publishes Water Tap twice a year in January and July. You can find electronic versions of the newsletter online at [doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater](http://doh.wa.gov/drinkingwater).

If you have questions or story ideas, contact Linda Waring, editor, at 360-236-3100 or [watertap@doh.wa.gov](mailto:watertap@doh.wa.gov).

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