

# Preparing for the Groundwater Rule

February 2009

DOH 331-390  
Revised

## Background

The federal Groundwater Rule (GWR) was finalized in October 2006. The GWR helps to protect people who drink groundwater that may be at risk of viral and bacterial contamination. The GWR applies to Group A public water systems that use wells, and sometimes springs, to provide groundwater as a drinking water source.

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has begun evaluating the impacts of the federal rule on public water systems, local health jurisdictions, and other stakeholders. Group A public water system requirements will be affected, including sanitary surveys, source monitoring, corrective actions, treatment, and public notification.

There are several things you can do to prepare for the GWR before its December 1, 2009, compliance date.

## Sanitary Surveys

- ***Correct deficiencies noted in your last sanitary survey.*** Deficiencies may include an inadequately sealed well or storage tank, chemical or bacterial sources of contamination within the sanitary control area, unprotected cross-connections, or similar public health risks. Refer to your most recent sanitary survey report to understand any deficiencies specific to your system. (If you need a copy of your report, contact your regional office sanitary survey program manager.) By correcting all deficiencies before your next sanitary survey, you will be better positioned to comply with the GWR.

## Source Monitoring

- ***Install a sample tap at each wellhead,*** if one isn't already there. The GWR requires a sample to be collected from the source when a total coliform distribution system sample is unsatisfactory. This GWR "triggered" source sample must be collected within 24 hours of receiving an unsatisfactory total coliform distribution system sample, and must be analyzed for a fecal indicator. If a sample isn't collected from the source within 24 hours, the system will receive a monitoring violation. Also, the source will not have been sampled when the risk to public health is high, and your customers may unknowingly be exposed to harmful bacteria and viruses. Each individual well in a well field must have a tap for collecting a sample at the wellhead.



- ***Know specifically where each well's water goes*** in your distribution system. For example, you may have wells that serve distinct pressure zones. If an unsatisfactory coliform sample occurs in a particular pressure zone, it may be possible to collect samples from only those wells serving that pressure zone. You may not be required to collect a fecal indicator sample from every well, thereby saving money, effort and time.

## **Corrective Actions**

- ***Update your Emergency Response Plan*** so you are ready to provide alternate water, if needed. If a significant deficiency is discovered during a sanitary survey, or if you have a fecal indicator in your source water, corrective action will be required. Depending on the deficiency, or the extent of fecal-related contamination, you may not be able to provide water from your system. An alternate water source may temporarily be needed. Having an up-to-date emergency response plan will prevent you from scrambling for information and assistance, and your customers will not be without water any longer than necessary.

## **Treatment**

- ***If you currently treat groundwater from a well***, contact your regional office engineer. The Office of Drinking Water will be confirming water system treatment records to identify those systems that currently achieve 4-log (99.99%) virus inactivation or removal. Systems that currently treat to this level will not be required to collect the “triggered” source sample, but will instead be required to meet treatment technique monitoring requirements. It is important for us to know which type of monitoring your water system will be required to do.

## **For More Information**

If you have questions about the Groundwater Rule, please contact our Rules Coordinator, Theresa Phillips at (360) 236-3147 or send an email to [theresa.phillips@doh.wa.gov](mailto:theresa.phillips@doh.wa.gov)

