

# Compliance requirements for Group B water systems

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## Background

Group B water systems serve two to 14 connections and are not subject to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Instead, they must meet state and local requirements for water quality and operations. Systems failing to meet these requirements are subject to enforcement action. This may include notifying customers, lending institutions or local building authorities about system inadequacies, which could affect loan approvals and building permits.

The state Department of Health (DOH) and local health jurisdictions (LHJs) share responsibility for administration of Group B drinking water requirements through Joint Plans of Operations. DOH does not regulate two-connection residential systems, but some LHJs regulate these systems.

This fact sheet covers **key operating requirements**. For complete requirements, see the Washington Administrative Code (WAC 246-291). The term "health department" refers to the agency responsible for administering the program in a specific county. Call your LHJ to identify the responsible agency where you live.

For direction on surface water or groundwater under the influence of surface water, call DOH at (800) 521-0323.

## Sampling requirements

**Bacteria:** A sample must be collected and analyzed for coliform at least once every 12 months. The sample must be taken at the furthest end of the distribution system, or as directed by the health department.

**Nitrate:** Following an initial complete inorganic and physical analysis, one nitrate sample must be collected from each source or well field every 36 months.

**Other Contaminants:** Additional samples are required in areas of known contamination, or if treatment is provided for any inorganic chemical or physical contaminant. Systems providing treatment must collect samples before and after treatment. The health department will determine how often samples must be taken.

**A state-certified lab must analyze all samples.** To get monitoring credit, your lab forms must include the:

- Water system name, public water system identification number and system type (Group B).
- Date and time the sample was collected.
- Sample location (street address or other type of location identifier).

The health department may require additional sampling. For a list of certified laboratories, visit Department of Ecology's Web site at [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/labs/labs\\_main.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/labs/labs_main.html)

## Record-keeping requirements

Ask the health department for the specific records required in your area. All water systems must retain:

- Bacteriological and turbidity analyses for five years.
- Chemical analyses (including nitrates) for as long as the system is in operation.
- Other records of operation and analyses for three years.
- Records of corrective action and public notifications for three years.
- System evaluations and related material for 10 years.



## Reporting requirements

**Water facilities inventory and report form (WFI):** You must submit an updated WFI form to the health department at least once every three years, and within 30 days of water system changes, such as the number of homes being served, the owner or operator name, or a new address or contact phone number. Updates speed retrieval of information for your use or lending institutions requiring information for loan approval.

**Bacteria detected:** You must contact the health department before the end of the next business day after the laboratory notifies the system that fecal coliform or E. coli has been detected in a sample, and within 10 days if coliform is detected.

**Maximum contaminant level (MCL) violations:** You must contact the health department before the end of the next business day after the laboratory notifies the system of an MCL violation. Customers must be contacted within 14 days.

**Other records:** You must provide operational records to the health department upon request.

## System maintenance and operations

**Sanitary control area:** Protecting a water source from potential sources of contamination is one of the most important aspects of owning and operating a public water system. The system owner must maintain and enforce covenants to protect source water. Covenants generally cover a 100-foot radius around the well, but the size of the protected area may vary.

**System operation and reliability:** You must guard against contamination from unprotected cross connections, and conduct operations and maintenance in a way to minimize failures and provide safe, reliable water to customers. If power outages, pump failures or other problems occur, you must notify your customers.

**Conserve water:** If your system-wide water use exceeds 5,000 gallons a day, or the total property being irrigated by the system exceeds ½-acre, you must get a water right permit from Department of Ecology.

- Before a system expands beyond the existing number of approved connections, plans must be submitted to the health department for approval.
- If more than 14 residences eventually will be served, proceed as if you have a Group A public water system. Follow the requirements in WAC 246-290 to protect the system's ability to grow.
- All water systems should conserve water, budget, and establish rates to meet expenses. Contact the health department for information on water system budgeting.

The health department may also require newer systems to incorporate specific conservation measures.

## New Group B water systems

State law places Group B systems created after July 1995 into one of the following categories:

- Systems owned or operated by a state-approved Satellite Management Agency.
- Systems approved under condition of future management or ownership by a state-approved Satellite Management Agency. The health department may require these systems to have satellite management if they are unable to meet financial viability or other operating requirements.

## Future actions

DOH is working with LHJs and other interested parties to thoroughly evaluate the Group B regulatory program. The evaluation will measure the scope of the program and include information from statewide site assessments to determine how many systems are in compliance. The findings will be used to develop comprehensive recommendations DOH will deliver to the state Board of Health.

## For more information

Please call one of the DOH regional offices listed below:

**Eastern Region** – (509) 456-3115

**Northwest Region** – (253) 395-6750

**Southwest Region** – (360) 664-0768