



## Questions & Answers

# Municipal Water Law Changes

### **Why is the state changing its approach to the Municipal Water Law?**

A judge has ruled that sections of the law concerning water rights, municipal water suppliers, and municipal water supply purposes are unconstitutional. We are appealing the ruling, but we must follow it until the case is final. For now, we are changing how we enforce the Water Use Efficiency Rule.

### **How does the ruling affect my water system?**

The ruling considers water systems private unless they are owned by a governmental entity, such as a city or public utility district. Privately-owned water systems do not fit the definition of a “municipal water supplier” and do not have to comply with the Water Use Efficiency Rule.

### **Which water efficiency requirements no longer apply to private systems?**

These systems are no longer required to install customer service meters or publicly establish water efficiency goals. They also are not subject to the 10 percent leakage standard, and they do not have to submit an annual water use efficiency report to the Department of Health.

### **What are the water use efficiency requirements for private systems?**

All private systems must include basic water use efficiency elements in their water system planning documents. We will provide guidance on how to meet this requirement. Additionally, each system must install a meter on its water source.

### **Why are meters so important?**

Installing meters is the most important step you can take to establish an effective water use efficiency program. Meters provide the information you need to evaluate water use and leakage, and they help you prioritize your water use efficiency efforts. Installing service meters and billing your customers based on the amount of water used is the most effective water efficiency measure you can implement. Once customers realize how much water they are using, water demand tends to decrease, which will save you money on energy costs, treatment, storage, and distribution.



HELPING TO ENSURE SAFE AND RELIABLE DRINKING WATER

If you are not ready to install meters, you can take an interim step by installing meter boxes at each customer connection when street or sidewalk repairs, landscaping projects, or other excavation/utility projects occur in your community. You can also install zone meters to isolate sections of the distribution system. This strategy will enable you to prioritize zones that have the most leaks and evaluate how to proceed with a water loss control action plan.

### **Why should our private system install meters now if we're not required to?**

Meters help identify water loss. Lost water has a value. Consider the cost to pump, treat, store, and distribute the water. Take these factors into account and you'll find that fixing leaks makes economical sense. We estimate the per-connection cost for installing a meter is \$5.30 to \$7.35 per month. This includes the cost of the meter, installation, and meter reading and is financed with a 15-year loan at 6 percent interest. Over time, today's investment in service meters and repairing leaks will pay for itself.

### **Will other parts of the court ruling affect our water system?**

Yes. Your water system planning requirements and water rights may be affected. We are working with the Department of Ecology to identify changes we may need to make in the review of water system plans and water rights to comply with the court ruling.

### **Where can I find out more about these changes and the court ruling?**

For additional information, visit these Web sites:

**Department of Health:** <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/mwl-legal.htm>

**Department of Ecology:** [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/muni\\_wtr.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/muni_wtr.html)

