WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2023 Capacity Development Program Annual Report

Washington State Department of HEALTH

DOH 331-733 · September 2024

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NOTE/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Safe Drinking Water Act requires states to report on their Capacity Development Program implementation annually. Information in this report addresses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's criteria for assessing state implementation of the Capacity Development Program.

Washington State Department of HEALTH

Office of Drinking Water
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September 23, 2024

Chris Affeldt
Drinking Water Unit, Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

Dear Mr. Affeldt:

The Office of Drinking Water at the Department of Health respectfully submits this letter and accompanying Washington State 2023 Capacity Development Program Annual Report. This provides information on our capacity development program activities for new and existing public water systems.

This report highlights program improvements, progress and program objectives during the past fiscal year. Challenges and successes are listed in detail with a focus on attention to include support through technical assistance and funding for disadvantaged communities, attention to cybersecurity in an ever-changing environment, and adaptation to address emerging contaminants across the state.

Additional strategies include program commitment to infrastructure funding options, workforce development, source water protection, and regulations for lead, copper, and PFAS. With new regulations comes outreach, education and operator support to continue to ensure systems have the technical, managerial, and financial resources required. We continue to provide presentations, attend conferences and external organization meetings to keep our regulated community informed and in compliance.

We look forward to continuing to find improvements and efficiencies in our programs and processes. Our continued commitment is to support public water systems to maintain the equitable provision of safe and reliable drinking water for residents of Washington. If you have questions, please contact Brad Burnham, Policy and Planning Section Manager, at brad.burnham@doh.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Holly R. Myers
Director, Office of Drinking Water
Environmental Public Health
Washington State Department of Health

Enclosures

cc: Brad Burnham, Policy and Planning Section Manager, Office of Drinking Water, Washington State Department of Health
Rick Green, Senior Policy Advisor, Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10
Mike Means, Capacity Development and Policy Manager, Office of Drinking Water, Washington State Department of Health

Introduction

This report uses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) reporting criteria to describe the Office of Drinking Water's (ODW) capacity development program implementation for new and existing drinking water systems during July 1, 2023—June 30, 2024. Some program data is summarized for the 2023 calendar year due to challenges in tabulating it for the fiscal year. This report highlights program improvements, progress and program objectives during the past fiscal year.

We regulate public water systems under state law and a formal primacy agreement with EPA. This agreement delegates authority to the state of Washington to implement the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). In 1974, the SDWA established national drinking water standards aimed at preventing waterborne illness. In 1996, SDWA amendments required each state to develop and carry out a capacity development strategy to:

1. Ensure all newly created systems meet technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity.
2. Establish a long-term strategy to assist existing systems in acquiring and maintaining TMF capacity.
3. Ensure all water systems funded through the State Revolving Fund demonstrate TMF capacity.

Washington State's capacity development strategy and compliance and enforcement strategy prioritize providing technical assistance to systems with violations. This report summarizes the year's activities implementing our strategy. We outline new and existing system capacity development strategies developed, adopted, and implemented to ensure newly proposed water systems and existing water systems have the technical, financial, and managerial capacity to achieve and maintain compliance with federal regulations.

A. New Systems Program Annual Reporting Criteria

1. ***Has the State's legal authority (statutes/regulations) to implement the New Systems Program changed within the previous reporting year? If so, please explain and identify how this has affected or impacted the implementation of the New Systems Program (additional documentation, such as an Attorney General (AG) statement or a statement from a delegated department attorney, may be required.) If not, no additional information on legal authority is necessary.***

   No.

2. ***Have there been any modifications to the State's control points? If SO, describe the modifications and any impacts these modifications have had on implementation of the New Systems program. If not, no additional information on control points is necessary.***

   There were no modifications to the state's control points. Washington State addresses new system capacity in two ways.

   a. New water systems must demonstrate capacity through a water system planning review and approval process. The principal goal of water system planning is to identify current and future demands, apply available resources to provide high quality service at the lowest cost, and protect the community's health. Planning is a cornerstone of water system capacity. Water systems with strong TMF capacity are well-positioned to provide efficient, high-quality service now and into the future.
   b. New water systems must have engineering reports and construction documents reviewed and approved by our regional engineering staff prior to construction. Our review focuses on risk reduction and public health protection. Reviewing engineering documents ensures compliance with regulatory standards. We strive to share our collective experience to promote construction and operation of appropriate, safe, reliable, and sustainable public water supply systems. Our goal is to help the design engineer and water system owner build a project that is safe and reliable now and into the future. We do this by asking questions, exploring risk versus available resources in the design phase, and helping water system owners and design engineers identify potential consequences of operational failure. Potential consequences can include contamination leading to illness, impacts of health advisories, permit restriction, or legal liability to customers.

   During our work, ODW staff may identify an existing Group A water system that was not previously regulated under our Group A public water system regulations. This typically occurs when Group B systems add additional unapproved connections to their water system, or the populations served by the Group B systems increase to serve 25 or more people a day for more than 60 days a year due to changes of use or increases in the number people per household. These newly identified systems are more likely to be out of compliance and result in a score of 11 or more on EPA's Enforcement Targeting Tool (ETT). We support these systems in multiple ways.

   - State regulations require all new water systems with 10 or more residential connections to meet all design and approval requirements under our Group A regulations, including the water system planning and design requirements. This helps ensure TMF capacity if the

system is serving 25 or more people a day in the future. The average persons per household in Washington State is 2.55; it is assumed that water systems with 10 more connections will routinely serve 25 people a day at some future date.

- Sanitary surveys are scheduled for newly identified existing Group A water systems in the next survey year to identify any TMF capacity deficiencies and to provide any needed technical assistance. At this time, the office may issue a directive detailing information that must be submitted or completed to obtain compliance with our regulations.
- The newly identified existing water system's operating permit is Blue, indicating that the water system has more connections than the system was approved for or that ODW staff has not verified the capacity of the water systems.
- The newly identified system may be required, at the department's discretion, to provide at a minimum for approval:
    - A water system planning document.
    - As-builts or recording drawings.
    - Water quality analysis.

3. *List new systems (PWSID & Name) in the State within the past three years and indicate whether those systems have been on any of the annual* Significant Non-Compliers *(SNC) lists (as generated annually by EPA 's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance).*

We continue to use EPA's ETT Tracker, which shows ETT trends over consecutive quarters. We appreciate the tool's ability to show trends and filter in various ways, including "by new system." We used the ETT Tracker to identify if new systems have compliance issues and determine whether they appeared as priority systems on any previous ETT lists.

During the last three calendar years of 2021-2023, we added 91 new systems to the state's inventory. These systems included 13 community water systems, 7 nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) water systems, and 71 transient noncommunity (TNC) water systems. There was only one community system and one nontransient noncommunity system that scored 11 or more on the ETT list (See table 1 below). Each of these systems were existing systems that reached federal regulatory status, and we are working to bring them into compliance.

Table 1

	Community Water Systems	Nontransient Noncommunity Systems	Transient Noncommunity Systems	Total
New in calendar year 2023	13	7	81	101
On ETT list with score ≥ 11	1	0	1	2

List of new systems.

- New Community Water Systems with ETT scores greater than or equal to 11.
    1. WA53AC681, Dakota Heights Water System
        - This system was mistakenly included on the ETT list with a score of GE 11 due to historical scores applied to the system during the 2017 compliance period when they were not a Group A water system. This system was reclassified to a federally regulated Group A Community water system in May 2021. All monitoring violations returned to compliance in July 2023. The system is currently in compliance as of data reporting in June 2024.

- New Community Water Systems in compliance or with ETT scores less than 11.
    1. WA53AC551, Allyn Carey
    2. WA5332074, Badger Canyon Ranchettes #2
    3. WA53AD929, Brixey H2A
    4. WA53AE123, Clouse Water System
    5. WA53AC131, Desert Hills
    6. WA53AB325, Game Farm Estates
    7. WA53AE050, Grandview Condominiums
    8. WA5311656, Mountain View
    9. WA53AE120, OPR H2A
    10. WA53AD362, Palomino Fields
    11. WA53AD861, Tulip Meadows
    12. WA5300615, West Deer Lake #1

- New TNC Water Systems with ETT scores greater than or equal to 11.
    1. WA53AB836, Cameo Heights
        - The system had some issues with their monitoring requirements when transitioning from a Group B to a Group A public water system in 2022. Eastern Regional Staff worked with the system and encouraged them to hire a certified operator. Since hiring an operator, the system has been in compliance with their monitoring requirements.

- New TNC Water Systems in compliance or with ETT scores less than 11.
    1. WA53AE162, A&B Farmworker Housing
    2. WA5306884, Adventures in Learning Preschool
    3. WA53AD878, Angels Rest

4. WA53AD860, Aviator Black Sands
5. WA53AD972, Aviator North
6. WA53AE022, Awareness Water System
7. WA5359574, Barney-N-Bernies W.S.
8. WA53AE058, Beddoe Farmworker Housing
9. WA53AE014, Benton Snipes
10. WA53AC334, BIG BEAR
11. WA5325621, BIG TOE SALVAGE
12. WA53AE055, Boast East Farmworker Housing
13. WA53AE087, Boast West Farmworker Housing
14. WA53AC107, Bonny Gappa Water System
15. WA53AE140, Borton - Burbank Heights Jubilee #1
16. WA53AD904, Borton - Ephrata Camp
17. WA53AD986, Borton - Mesa Rock Ranch
18. WA53AE128, Borton - Occidental Camp I
19. WA53AE074, Buckeye Lane FWH
20. WA53AD912, Cabin Creek Lodge
21. WA53AD973, Castle Rock Travel Center
22. WA53AE158, Cherry Harvest Labor Camp
23. WA53AE155, Chiropractic Health Center
24. WA53AD952, Christensen Water System
25. WA53AD923, Conconully Bible Camp
26. WA5314933, COPPER CREEK INC
27. WA53AD166, Dancing Fish Farm
28. WA53AE149, Deception Pass Golf Center
29. WA53AE069, Dollar General
30. WA53AE086, Double M Mustang
31. WA53AD903, Edgewater Rocky Pond
32. WA53AE206, Finch Ranch FWH
33. WA53AE102, Frenchman Hills Dodson
34. WA53AE105, Frog Ranch Farmworker Housing
35. WA53AC047, Garrison Center
36. WA53AE066, Grant K East
37. WA53AE059, Grant Rd 25
38. WA53AD960, Grouse Farmworker Housing
39. WA53AE131, Halverstick Temp Farmworker Housing
40. WA5305794, HEDGES CELLARS
41. WA53AE137, Hi-Point 2
42. WA53AE052, K2 Ranches
43. WA5305403, Lakeview Heights HOA
44. WA53AE167, May Nursery TWH
45. WA53AE057, M-Bar-C Ranch
46. WA53AE187, Meany Lodge
47. WA53AE028, Missing Corner
48. WA53AD965, Monson Stardust H2A Housing

49. WA53AE042, Northside Community Church
50. WA53AD618, Orondo Cider Works
51. WA53AE199, Park Addition Water Association
52. WA53AD911, Peninsula Life Church
53. WA53AB040, Premium Quality Hay & Feed
54. WA53AE088, Randy Allred Orchards
55. WA53AE085, Rexius Farms Housing U104 B86
56. WA53AC016, Ridgeview Estates at Lake Roosevelt
57. WA53AE084, Riverview #3
58. WA53AD159, Rustic Ridge
59. WA53AA893, San Juan Vineyards Water System
60. WA53AD979, Sand Hollow 1 H2A
61. WA53AE127, Schad Holdings
62. WA53AD810, Sea Breeze
63. WA53AD784, Silver Bell Winery
64. WA5300768, South Blakely Maintenance Assn
65. WA53AD793, Stewarts Arena
66. WA53AE114, Sun Harbor SW
67. WA53AE216, Tahuya Adventure Resort
68. WA53AE204, Transition Bicycle Company
69. WA53AD826, Unit 60B
70. WA53AD857, Unit 67

- New NTNC Systems in compliance or with ETT scores less than 11.
    1. WA53AD699, Columbia Pulp I
    2. WA53AE124, Knife River Public Water Supply
    3. WA53AD578, Labbeemint Water System
    4. WA5306230, Lewis County Shop/Ethel
    5. WA53AD049, Port of Mattawa - Ind Parks 2 & 4
    6. WA53AE119, Price Cold Storage 2
    7. WA53AE047, PSE Whitehorn

B. Existing System Strategy

1. ***In referencing the State's approved existing systems strategy, which programs, tools, and/or activities were used, and how did each assist existing PWS in acquiring and maintaining technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) capacity? Discuss the target audience these activities have been directed towards.***

   In 2023, EPA approved our updated capacity development strategy. We began to incorporate the approaches from the new strategy into our work to support the 4,158 federally regulated public water systems in Washington. In addition, Washington State regulates about 13,588 small water systems that do not meet the federal government's criteria for a public water system, identified as Group B water systems. Although the Group B water systems are not subject to federal regulations, they are subject to Washington State Board of Health rules, which focus on initial water quality and water system design.

   ODW implements its capacity development program using a variety of resources and tools including, but not limited to, department capacity development activities and third-party technical assistance. Table 2 lists the capacity development activities and how each relates to the TMF capacity they can address. We will further discuss and describe how these activities were used to assist water systems in acquiring and maintaining TMF capacity over the last year.

Table 2: Capacity Development Activities

Activity	How this relates to capacity	Type of Capacity *Assessed or developed*		
		T	M	F
Sanitary Survey's	Department staff members conduct sanitary surveys to assess the condition of facilities, operations, and general management. The department also contracts with third parties to conduct surveys.	X	X	X
Operator Certification	Department staff members administer a regulatory program for the certification of water system operators.	X	X	
Construction Document Review	Department staff members review and approve construction documents for new facilities and treatment to ensure compliance with drinking water regulations and design standards.	X	X	
Water System Plan (WSP) Review	Department staff members review and approve WSPs to assess major components of capacity.	X	X	X
Small Water System Management Program (SWSMP) Review	Department staff members review, approve, and document completion of SWSMPs to assess major components of capacity.	X	X	X
Satellite Management Agency Plan Reviews (SMPs)	Department staff members review, approve, and monitor SMPs to assess specific regulatory requirements in order to receive and maintain approval as a satellite management agency.	X	X	X
Data Input and Management	Department staff members measure capacity program performance by entering, storing, and managing water system data.	X	X	X
Communications and Outreach	Department staff members use a variety of strategies to educate the drinking water community on regulations and water system requirements including capacity.	X	X	X
Technical Assistance	Department staff members and contracted technical assistance entities provide technical assistance to water systems and the public daily through calls, virtual meetings, on site visits, trainings, and electronic correspondence.	X	X	X
Enforcement/ Compliance	Department staff members apply enforcement in a prioritized and strategic manner to ensure water systems comply with state and federal drinking water regulations.	X	X	X
Performance Reporting	Department staff members generate performance reports for reporting to the governor and EPA.	X	X	X
Set Aside Project Development	Department staff members continually develop set aside funded projects and contracts aimed at improving capacity development in identified water systems.	X	X	X
State Revolving Fund (SRF) Loan Administration	Department staff members administer the SRF Loan Program to improve the water infrastructure of the state and enhance the technical, managerial and fiscal capacity of water systems.	X	X	X
Water Quality Monitoring Oversight and Assistance	Department staff members monitor system water quality monitoring efforts and help complete sampling.	X	X	
Training	Department staff members and contracted technical assistance entities provide training in drinking water regulations and programs.	X	X	X

Comprehensive Water System Planning

All (Group A) public water systems are required to plan. In 2023, we completed 104 reviews of new and updated water system planning documents.

Group A community water systems with 1,000 or more connections, new community water systems, and expanding community water systems are required to submit a water system plan (WSP) to DOH for review and approval (WAC 246-290-100). All other Group A systems are required to maintain a small water system management program (SWSMP—WAC 246-290-105). New nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) water systems and water systems interested in being eligible for Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) construction loans, that are not otherwise required to complete a WSP, are required to submit their SWSMP to DOH for review and approval. WSPs may be approved for up to 10 years, based on provided information, and approved SWSMPs are not provided with an expiration date, rather, they must be maintained and updated over time.

We developed the *Water System Planning Guidebook* 331-068 for WSPs and two guidebooks specific to the SWSMP (331-134 for community systems and 331-474 for noncommunity systems) aimed at helping water system governing bodies, managers, and operators navigate the planning requirements to build a robust planning document appropriate for their water system. These guidebooks detail key TMF elements important to complete water system planning documents. Our regional planners work with water systems to apply an appropriate level of planning that meets each system's needs. The appropriate level of planning expectations is established at a preplanning conference, held between DOH regional planners and engineers, water systems, and contract engineers before work on the planning document begins.

We revised the Water System Planning Guidebook to align with 2023 state legislation. This new law, RCW 43.20.310, requires Group A community public water systems with one thousand or more connections to include a climate resilience element in their water system plan. It also requires systems to assess the risk of extreme weather events, assess critical assets, and complete cost benefit analysis of the system's risk reduction strategies. Our office is receiving support from the University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group in the work to develop tools for systems to meet the new law. The new requirements will strengthen each system's long-term capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies caused by extreme weather events.

The regional planners provide technical assistance by phone, email, virtual and in-person meetings, and at conferences. Planners lead and facilitate meetings on a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to, asset management, budgeting, funding, governance, rates, disaster resiliency and preparedness, source water protection, regional collaboration and consolidation, receivership, and water use efficiency. Our technical assistance contracts with Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and Department of Commerce Small Communities Initiative (SCI) provide support for water systems in need of additional assistance.

Asset management is a core foundation of ensuring long-term capacity for public water systems in the water system planning process. Our new strategy clarifies and expands on how asset management pertains to our planning process. We incorporated asset management concepts into all our planning guidance documents. In addition, we created a training program with RCAC to teach water systems how to incorporate asset management into their current operations and planning programs.

We look at water system planning documents as a foundation, where the water system takes a comprehensive look at its needs and statutory requirements and charts a plan of action for the plan approval period and the twenty-year planning landscape. Elements of these plans are reviewed every three to five years during routine sanitary surveys to ensure water systems are continually planning for the future. Water systems must have a current and approved WSP or SWSMP to apply for DWSRF construction loans. These plans are also a means of ensuring water systems work to build capacity according to the expectations of the 1996 amendments to the federal SDWA.

Operator Certification

Aging infrastructure, increased water system demands, declining aquifers, workforce challenges, advancing technologies, and inadequate funding make the job of the certified operator more challenging and important than ever. The Operator Certification and Training (OC&T) Section leads our office to:

- Receive, process, and assist candidates with waterworks certification exam applications.
- Track, assist, and enforce annual certification renewal and tri-annual continuing education requirements.
- Receive, process, assist, and provide practical exams for Backflow Assembly Tester candidates.
- Review training for relevancy toward operator continuing education requirements.
- Evaluate, provide, track, and enforce temporary certifications.
- Identify, assist, and enforce water system operator requirements.
- Work with data management staff to ensure certified operator information remains relevant and easily accessible.
- Provide technical assistance on water system operational issues.
- Receive, investigate, and prosecute complaints against operators.
- Work with our external partners through our Operator Certification Advisory Committee and Training and Technical Assistance Providers Group.
- Provide innovation in workforce development, succession planning, inter- and intra-agency coordination, rule and policy revision, and maintaining a national perspective.

Workforce development continues to be one of our greatest issues now that more operators are retiring or leaving the business. For example, 1,011 certified operators have failed to renew their certifications in the last three years with another 500-600 expected to leave the industry at the end of 2024.

Please see the Waterworks Operator Certification Program Annual Report to EPA for more information. Contact Bill Bernier, Operator Certification and Training Section Manager, at 360-236-3562 or william.bernier@doh.wa.gov if you have any questions.

Sanitary Surveys (Inspections)

ODW regional engineers and staff usually survey larger water systems and systems with treatment to reduce a primary contaminant. Local health jurisdiction (LHJ) staff survey the state's numerous small public water systems. LHJ staff conduct more than half of the hundreds of (and sometimes more than 1,000) sanitary surveys performed each year. Without our local health partners, we could not successfully meet our responsibilities to complete effective sanitary surveys within mandated timeframes at current staffing levels. Training our local staff and supporting them with contracts to conduct surveys helps ensure local capacity to respond to drinking water emergencies.

As shown in Table 3, we completed 893 sanitary surveys in 2023 with the support of our partners. We continue to refine our internal processes and support our external partners as we work together toward the target of completing all scheduled sanitary surveys each year.

Table 3: Sanitary surveys completed in 2023

Region/Surveyor	CWS	NTNC	TNC	Totals
ERO DOH Surveyors	66	23	84	173
ERO LHJ/3rd Party Surveyors	14	5	87	106
NWRO DOH Surveyors	127	10	53	190
NWRO LHJ/3rd Party Surveyors	90	4	35	129
SWRO DOH Surveyors	91	8	25	124
SWRO LHJ/3rd Party Surveyors	77	18	76	171
Totals	465	68	360	893

When we find deficiencies or problems, we explain to water systems how to correct them. We classify findings from a sanitary survey in accordance with the *Sanitary Survey Field Guide* 331-486.

- Significant deficiencies include, but are not limited to, defects in design, operation, or maintenance, or a failure or malfunction of the sources, treatment, storage, or distribution system that the state determines to be causing, or have potential for causing, the introduction of contamination into the water delivered to consumers (40 CFR 141.403(a)(4)). If left unaddressed, a significant deficiency directly creates a significant public health risk.
- Significant finding includes a lack of access or information, which interferes with the surveyor's assessment into whether a significant deficiency exists; or a defect or problem, which, if left unaddressed, indirectly creates a significant risk to the physical safety, security, or reliability of the public drinking water supply.
- Observation includes a finding in which a regulator requirement is not met, and the problem or defect is not otherwise identified as a significant deficiency or significant finding.
- Recommendation includes any other item the surveyor deems appropriate. This may include items such as development of a flushing plan to installing dedicated sampling stations.

We set compliance deadlines and follows up to make sure systems address both significant deficiencies and significant findings. The sanitary surveyor may also refer water systems to other programs. Staff may use referrals when identifying sanitary survey issues that require additional follow-up, training, or technical support from ODW staff. In 2023, total findings were reduced across the state. See Table 4 for sanitary survey finding classifications during the year.

Table 4: 2023 Sanitary Survey Findings (reported by calendar year)

Finding Classifications	Totals 2023
Significant Deficiencies	488
Significant Findings	432
Observations	148
Recommendations	137
Referrals	27
Totals	**1,232**

Engineering Submittal Review

Water system staff must submit project reports and construction documents for review and approval prior to installation or construction of any new water system, water system extension, or improvement. We may require the submittal of a project report for the purpose of resolving a system operational problem. Exceptions to this requirement are:

- Installation of valves, fittings, meters, and approved backflow prevention assemblies.
- Installation of fire hydrants.
- Repair of a system component or replacement with a component of a similar capacity and material in accordance with the original construction specifications of the approved design. For the purposes of replacing existing pipe, similar capacity includes one standard pipe size larger.
- Maintenance or painting of surfaces not contacting potable water.

Staff reviewed 460 engineering documents in 2023. Our review focused on risk-reduction and public health protection. In reviewing engineering documents, we intend to ensure compliance with regulatory standards. We also strive to share our collective experience to promote construction and operation of appropriate, safe, reliable, and sustainable public water supply systems. Our ultimate goal is to help the design engineer and water system owner build a project that is safe and reliable now and into the future. We do this by asking questions, exploring risk versus available resources in the design phase, and identifying potential consequences of operational failure.

Source Water Protection (SWP) Program

During 2023, we restored our SWP staffing to its previous level of service and added a new team member for surface water control or "watershed protection" coordination. With full staffing, we are growing the program and outreach efforts to outside groups significantly and adding value around SWP.

We upgraded the Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) online mapping tool to better focus on SWP data. SWAP is an important part of Washington's approach to raising awareness in agencies and the public about SWP. We began the process of converting our web tool to an ArcGIS online platform and continue to explore innovations in spatial tools to make data readily available. The SWAP web tool sees over 600 discrete visits per month, indicating increased traffic over last year as we continue to promote the tool and refer to it.

We have a grant project in place with Clark County Public Health for water quality data collection related to PFAS detections. We continue to encourage local governments and individual purveyors to upgrade their wellhead protection areas from the calculated fixed radius mathematical approach to modeling that considers groundwater flow in an area and better identifies protection efforts. Public water system capacity is a limitation to progress on this project and we are advocating for regional or county-level modeling projects.

Water Quality Monitoring Oversight and Assistance

Our Water Quality and Data Management staff send monitoring and reporting reminders to water systems prior to missing compliance dates. Our staff send reminders to systems that have not met a monitoring or reporting requirement prior to the compliance date for consumer confidence reports, annual and triennial

lead and copper monitoring, and annual nitrate monitoring. In 2023, we sent these reminders to all purveyors of the water system.

We provide a Water Quality Monitoring Schedule (WQMS) for all community and NTNC water systems. The WQMS is available online for water systems and includes when the last sample was collected and the next sample due date for each water quality parameter or suite of chemicals.

ODW water quality staff provide individual technical assistance for water systems that have MCL violations, treatment technique violations, treatment technique triggers, and action level exceedances. We work with each water system to develop corrective action plans to determine milestones to address these violations. Systems needing additional support and funding can be referred to third party technical assistance providers to meet capacity development needs.

We track, store, and share public water system data with systems and the public on our Drinking Water System Data webpage. We provide customers with information about their water system, including water quality history, operating permit, and compliance status.

In May 2023, we kicked off the transition to the Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS) database through contracted services through EPA implementation assistance. Over the last year we focused on data mapping for the transition. As of June 30, 2024, GEC completed 42 percent of the data mapping and 3 percent of the data transformation activities to SDWIS. The goal is to have long-term sustainable data management and tools for supporting public water systems and their customers as well as reporting information to EPA.

Communications and Outreach

Our main ODW website, together with annual consumer confidence reports, keep customers informed about the overall performance of their water system. We continue to offer over 400 publications to provide technical assistance and information to water systems and their customers. Publications are reviewed by staff annually to ensure they are up to date, still relevant, and provide accurate information. ODW's 2023-2024 operational plan includes a goal to improve language access of our resources for non-English speaking residents. We continued to focus on translating our public notifications and documents for the public into the top five languages spoken in Washington.

Our publications provide a range of technical assistance to support water system capacity development. Our publications database includes fact sheets on sampling guidance, templates to develop sampling plans, cross-connection control program templates, draft public notifications, and tech tips on how to correct deficiencies identified in a sanitary survey. In 2023, we developed 13 new publications and updated or revised 25 publications. Table 5 lists some of the new or revised publications and the TMF capacity they address.

We continued to improve our newsletter to water system purveyors, *ODW Now*, which provides information ranging from new regulations to system operations. We increased the visual appeal and article detail of the downloadable newsletter. We publish *ODW Now* electronically bimonthly. Historical and recent copies can be downloaded from our newsletter webpage.

We continue to hold quarterly virtual Drinking Water Advisory Group (DWAG) meetings. With virtual availability we have attendees from around the state. We provide updates on our office, legislative items,

available funding and loan cycles, PFAS contaminants, the new Memorandum of Understanding with Ecology, and the Water Use Efficiency program audit. We also use these meetings to have discussions on different TMF needs and ask for water system feedback on proposed new regulations and policies to identify additional communications and outreach needs to support water systems to meet these new requirements. Meeting materials and notes are posted to the DWAG meeting webpage.

Similar to DWAG, staff attend regional water utility coordination meetings around the state, such as the Clark County Water Utility Coordinating Council, Thurston County Purveyors meeting, the Regional Water Cooperative of Pierce County, and others. One example of this work is with the South Chehalis/Urban Growth Area (UGA) Design meeting, a multijurisdictional workgroup that meets every two weeks to discuss development in south Chehalis and the southern Chehalis UGA. We support the workgroup by providing guidance on funding applications and water system planning to support the group's work to inform and steer a utility assessment of the area.

We facilitated and participated in community meetings on PFAS in drinking water. With the Office of Public Affairs and Equity (OPAE) and Office of Environmental Public Health Sciences (OEPHS), ODW staff attended community-led PFAS Listening Sessions across the state in: Selah (near Yakima), Hannah Heights (on San Juan Island), Coupeville (Whidbey Island), and the West Plains area (near Spokane). The purpose of the listening sessions was to update the community on actions state and local agencies are taking and to listen to understand outstanding questions, concerns, and requests. We answered various health questions, including questions on point of use (POU) treatment systems installation and the safety of consuming livestock watered with contaminated water.

Table 5: Publications

Publication Name	Summary of publication	Type of Capacity Developed		
		T	M	F
Data Validation: Improve Your Annual WUE Report 331-576	Two-page FAQ about the importance of collecting and reporting accurate information for you Water Use Efficiency Report.	X		
DWSRF Tri-Fold Brochure 331-732	Provides general information on DWSRF, including loans and projects, steps for applying for funding, eligibility, and key contacts.	X	X	X
Lead Service Line Inventory Customer Survey Form 331-746	This survey plays a vital role in helping public water systems fulfill lead service line inventory requirements. It helps customers determine where their water service line is and what material the line is made of.	X		
Legal Protections for Your Sanitary Control Area 331-048	Nine-page guidance on covenants water systems use to ensure no source of contamination is constructed, stored, discarded, or applied within the sanitary control area around wells and springs.	X	X	
Manganese Health Advisory Above 0.3 mg/L 331-736 Health Advisory Above 0.3 mg/L 331-736	Public notification form for Manganese Health Advisory above 0.3 mg/L.	X	X	
Statistical Guidance for Group A PWS Evaluation of Unknown Service Lines 331-723	This four-page statistical approach provides a method for Group A public water systems (PWS) to complete a lead service line inventory, eliminating the need to inspect every unknown service line.	X		
Unapproved Auxiliary Water Supplies 331-743	Unapproved auxiliary water supplies pose a huge risk to public health. This document provides guidance and references for water systems dealing with unapproved auxiliary water supplies.	X	X	

Security and Emergency Response Program

ODW works with water systems and others to plan, prevent, and prepare to respond to security breaches and emergencies. We are the lead agency for drinking water, Emergency Support Function (ESF 3) for several statewide planning groups such as the State Catastrophic Incident Planning Team (SCIPT), State Hazard Mitigation Work Group, and State Cybersecurity Advisory Committee to coordinate multi-jurisdictional, regional, and/or statewide response to various emergencies (natural hazards, accidents, and malevolent acts).

We help water systems assess, respond, and return to normal operations after all types of emergencies from more routine occurrences like water main breaks to large-scale events like flooding, wildfires, extreme weather events, and drought. In 2023-2024, we provided response and support with:

- Technical assistance to seventeen water systems surrounding emergency response plan development.
- Three water systems with alternative water source storage and distribution plans.

- Customer service support, and presentations at five conferences.

Specific additional examples are highlighted below.

Tabletop Exercise

ERO staff, along with twenty-one City of Spokane staff attended the City of Spokane Tabletop Exercise. City of Spokane's water quality worked with ERO to develop an *E. coli* exercise. Participants gained valuable experience in identifying who may be impacted, what steps should be taken to protect the public and the system, how to be equitable in providing public notice, and juggling what work is needed to get the system back into compliance. The exercise was well received, and staff did a great job engaging the situation to run through possible issues and develop a solid plan of attack. Additional benefits from the tabletop exercise included building partnerships and awareness of responsible staff from both agencies for direct coordination during actual events.

Cybersecurity

We are the chair of the water subcommittee for the State Cybersecurity Advisory Committee. The State Cybersecurity Advisory Committee was established by the state legislature 2022-2023 session and requires the Military Department's Emergency Management Division to establish a cybersecurity advisory committee focused on providing the state legislature with cybersecurity status and advice that is relevant across critical infrastructure sectors. Lastly, we completed our state Cybersecurity Action Plan that detailed a multiagency approach to assessing the status of cybersecurity in the water sector, assessing the needs of the water sector, and moving towards a mechanism for public water systems to routinely address cybersecurity. The ultimate long-term goal is for public water systems that serve a population greater than 3,300 persons to routinely conduct cybersecurity vulnerability assessments, address known vulnerabilities, and complete incident response plans.

We gave cybersecurity related presentations to water systems on six occasions, including:

- Presentations and technical assistance during DWAG meetings.
- Providing and distributing short educational messages in our *ODW Now* newsletter.
- Presenting at Evergreen Rural Water of Washington conferences.
- Presenting at Pacific Northwest section of American Water Works Association conference.

Wildfires

We track wildfires and proactively reach out to water systems that may be affected and offer technical assistance. During the 2023 wildfire season (June-December), Our office drafted a Wildfire and Drinking Water Protecting Sources After Fires fact sheet to aid water systems in recovery efforts which should be published in September 2024. There were 1,884 fires and we conducted welfare checks/offered technical assistance to 468 water systems.

Our Northwest Regional Office (NWRO) provided support to water systems during the Sourdough Wildfire. The Sourdough Fire was reported on July 29, 2023, on the southwest end of Ross Lake in the North Cascades National Park (Whatcom County). The fire burned over 6,389 acres and closed recreation areas and parts of the state highway. The National Park Service (NPS) water operations team worked with fire fighters to monitor water systems at the Environmental Learning Center, Newhalem Campground, and Ross Lake Resort. Even though the communities were evacuated, it was important for the water operations team to be in contact with responders to make sure fire fighters had access to a consistent water supply.

Our Eastern Regional Office (ERO) Drinking Water staff attended an interagency "virtual resource roundtable (tech-team style)" requested by the city of Medical Lake to discuss wildfire recovery needs. The August Gray Fire had a significant effect on the city and surrounding area, burning over 10,000 acres, destroying 265 structures, and causing one death. Discussion topics at this roundtable included debris removal and site cleanup, temporary housing for displaced families, and adding water and sewer infrastructure to the west shore of Silver Lake. ERO staff are providing technical assistance to the city on their proposed project to extend public water system connections to affected areas to meet current needs and improve disaster resiliency in the future.

Chemical Spill

A BP gas pipeline spilled approximately 30,660 gallons of gasoline during December 2023 near Mount Vernon creeks. NWRO staff members helped the Department of Ecology (Ecology) identify drinking water wells in the affected area. NWRO staff and Skagit County Health staff helped Ecology develop a sampling plan to evaluate the extent of contamination and potential impacts to drinking water sources and provided expertise on appropriate lab analysis used for drinking water sources. Reuters wrote a story about it titled BP Restarts Pipeline After Gasoline Spill in Washington State-Source (reuters.com).

Weather Events

During an extreme weather event which froze pipes across the state in January 2024, staff in regional offices assisted water systems throughout the state with health advisories and associated activities due to freezing temperatures and broken pipes. ODW staff also followed up with affected water systems providing support and technical consultation until they restored services and returned to normal operations. ERO is helping several water systems to procure new water sources, building capacity and resources for funding opportunities, and enabling water systems to continue providing clean and safe drinking water to their consumers.

In the fall of 2023, ODW, Whatcom County, Whatcom PUD, and the Department of Ecology worked with four small water associations near Ferndale (Whatcom County) that were not able to meet their typical summer water demand. Together these four systems serve a combined population of over 400. While they have maintained pressure, they had to carefully manage their wells, with extremely low production. These water systems took short term actions including extreme conservation, lowering their well pumps, supplementing supply with trucked water, and carefully managing pumping rates to avoid pumping air. Each system is working on a longer-term solution and looking for funding to serve their communities. Potential longer-term solutions may include constructing emergency interties and drilling more wells. While Whatcom County has seen warnings of low well capacity, this was the first time it has seen four Group A water systems come this close to losing pressure.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)

The DWSRF program provides technical assistance and funding for planning and construction activities to protect public health by implementing water system improvements. DWSRF funding programs provide opportunities for water systems to access low interest loans, possible subsidy through loan principal forgiveness for disadvantaged communities, grants for planning and consolidation activities, and dedicated funding to address emerging contaminants such as PFAS. The DWSRF supports these funding programs by providing technical assistance utilizing contracts with several providers targeting the improvement of the technical, managerial and fiscal capabilities of water systems. To meet the goals of the federal Justice 40 initiative and the state Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, small and

disadvantaged communities are a key focus for all funding opportunities and technical assistance activities.

DWSRF continues to promote capacity development for water systems throughout the state and encourages asset management to ensure long-term viability in water system management. To further develop asset management activities, DWSRF awards bonus points on construction loan applications if the applicant has:

- Attended asset management training (1 point).
- Developed an asset inventory with expected life assigned (6 points).

DWSRF also offers funding to recipients to develop an asset management program. DWSRF applicants that do not have an existing asset management program must develop an asset inventory, including expected life of assets and replacement costs for each asset. Applicants with an existing asset management program are provided with the ability to improve their asset management program. Additional information about the DWSRF program can be found in our annual DWSRF report.

As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, states were required to re-evaluate their definition of disadvantaged community (DAC) to consider alternative definitions or metrics in addition to an affordability index that compares water rates to county-wide median household income (MHI). In 2023, Washington Drinking Water State Revolving Fund program initiated the rulemaking process to update WAC 246-296 with a new definition of DAC and to allow up to 100 percent loan principal forgiveness. The rulemaking process included three community listening sessions and a comment period. The rulemaking additionally underwent the state Environmental Justice Assessment process identified in the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act to identify any impacts to overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. The definition of "disadvantaged community" in WAC 246-296 is generalized with a reference to specific social, environmental health and economic hardship metrics established in the SRF construction project guidelines that are updated annually and include a public comment process. The updated rule and accompanying guidance criteria allow for more water systems to be identified as serving DAC and potentially being eligible grants or subsidy for loan principal forgiveness. The current rule provides eligibility for water systems that qualify under an affordability index determination, a federally recognized tribe, or are communities that have environmental health disparities, social vulnerability indices, or have more than 30 percent of the population below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Being identified as a DAC does not guarantee a project will be funded or that it will receive loan principal forgiveness. These factors are dependent on the priority ranking of the project as well as the amount of subsidy available.

DWSRF offers emergency loans up to $500,000 to Group A not-for-profit water systems serving fewer than 10,000 people to cover emergency recovery activities. Funds from this program provide for recovery activities related to emergencies, such as drought and wildfires. This loan program ensures that loan funding is available to water systems that may be in violation of health and safety standards due to an intervening emergency event. Systems can use the funds for construction, reconstruction, replacement, rehabilitation, temporary repair, generator or treatment equipment rentals, or improvement needed to continue or restore drinking water service. DWSRF staff published the Emergency Loan and Funding Guidelines 331-545 (PDF) to explain the requirements for this program and needed documentation to successfully apply.

Small Communities Initiative

We continue to support the Small Communities Initiative (SCI) through a contract with the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce). Since 1999 SCI has been assisting small, rural cities and towns, unincorporated communities, counties, utility districts, and water associations in developing more focused projects, making strategic investments, and identifying and accessing appropriate funding sources. Through the help of SCI, more than 85 communities secured over $279 million in state and federal funding for their respective projects, resulting in safer drinking water, environmental protection, and improved infrastructure to serve community and economic development activities. The most helpful aspects of the SCI Program as reported by community leaders over the years include assistance with:

- Defining what the problem is, then articulating and prioritizing goals for the community.
- Developing action plans and sticking to them.
- Convening and facilitating meetings, focused on priorities.
- Creating an environment in which everyone can participate in the discussion.
- Helping to understand and complete regulatory and funding program requirements and processes.
- Introducing/connecting local elected officials and staff with appropriate agency staff and creating networking opportunities.
- Helping put a “face” on government.

We increased funding for SCI from 0.9 FTE last year, to 1.5 FTE this year. SCI worked closely with eleven water systems to provide technical expertise to apply for or obtain funding and manage infrastructure projects. These water systems often have challenges and would likely be ineligible for financial programs without the assistance of SCI. Direct technical assistance provided by SCI includes:

- Identifying appropriate funds for water system projects.
- Creating and implementing action plans with communities.
- Assisting with funding applications.
- Aiding in procurement documents and processes.
- Meeting other requirements such as contract management.
- Facilitating and documenting meetings.

Additionally, SCI provided limited assistance to seventeen water systems, discussing potential funding options for infrastructure improvement, and connecting them to other resources.

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)

We use part of our DWSRF set asides to fund an agreement with the RCAC to provide training and technical assistance to small communities across the state. RCAC assists systems with financial and managerial capacity building projects, such as rate studies, board training, and WSP and SWSMP development.

In 2023, RCAC held 40 training events for Washington water systems primarily using GoTo Training and had 918 attendees. RCAC additionally undertook a limited number of in person training and system assistance efforts, as well as coordinating system assistance through other TA contracts. So far in 2024, RCAC has held 12 training events for Washington water systems using GoTo Training, with 440 attendees. Washington Certification Systems allotted 0.3 CEUs for each training course.

Celerity Consulting Group, LLC

We use part of our set-asides in a limited technical assistance agreement with Celerity Consulting Group, LLC (Celerity) to help small public water systems across the state submit Lead Service Line inventories to meet the regulatory requirement. Celerity helps systems conduct an extensive record review of system service lines and uses county GIS/parcel data and all other available documentation to complete a draft inventory document for the water system to submit by the October 16, 2024, deadline. In 2023, Celerity helped six water systems draft a Lead Service Line Inventory, and so far in 2024, they helped an additional 31 systems.

Training

DOH staff provide training to complement the work of our technical assistance providers. This includes one-on-one training for water systems. Large groups are addressed at conferences and public meetings, receiving regulatory insight at various venues across the state. Training efforts also include facilitating comprehensive performance evaluations and performance-based goal setting. Examples from our NWRO include training on PFAS at a regional meeting of water systems in Pierce County and informative presentations at conferences during the year, such as the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council's conference and the American Water Works Association Pacific Northwest Section's conference.

ODW staff attended the Evergreen Rural Water of Washington Fall Conference in Yakima, August 2023. Operators of public water systems who must keep up to date on developments in water systems operations and regulatory requirements attend this conference. Attendees earn continuing education units, which they apply toward their certification requirements.
Several ODW staff presented various topics including:

- Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund.
- Source Water Protection.
- Foundational Public Health Services.
- PFAS.
- Sanitary Surveys.
- Lead Service Line inventories.
- Lead and Copper Rule Revisions.

In February 2024, several of our staff members attended the Evergreen Rural Water of Washington spring conference. We staffed a table with publications and helpful resources and talked to drinking water professionals about their jobs, the industry, and the challenges ahead.
Several staff gave presentations where operators earned continuing education credits. Topics included:

- Infrastructure Funding Options.
- DOH Updates.
- Workforce Development.
- Source Water Protection.
- Lead, Copper, and PFAS Contaminants.
- Cybersecurity awareness.

These conferences provide opportunities for our staff to network with each other and interact with water system personnel. Meeting the people we support is vital as staff members can explain operator certification processes and the exam system for certification.

Washington state has one of the country's most comprehensive operator certification programs. Our certified operators are ranked among the highest in the nation.

ODW staff hosted and participated in a Chlorine Lab Skills Class for Water System Professionals in both Puyallup and Yakima in 2024. Many public water systems add chlorine to their water supply for disinfection of harmful microorganisms that can cause illnesses. Water systems using chlorine must sample chlorine residuals and disinfection byproducts and report to us on a regular basis. Because source water and water systems differ, it takes skill to develop a system-specific monitoring plan, sample and test the water. Delivering safe and reliable water requires training and practice. With this training, ODW staff provided a high level of assistance to the public water systems in this area.

In March 2024, Northwest Washington Subsection, Pacific Northwest Section AWWA hosted a Day with DOH. ODW staff presented important and timely information and had meaningful conversations with partners. Topics included Sanitary Surveys, Watermain Break Responses, PFAS, and many others. This opportunity was well received by the nearly 150 attendees, which included LHJ staff, certified waterworks operators, and drinking water staff from public utilities. More Day with DOH events are scheduled in other areas of the state for later this year.

At the end of March 2024, the Washington State Parks hosted a training conference in Wenatchee. Denise Miles and Arnica Briody represented ODW and addressed questions about public drinking water system operations on Parks facilities. Washington State Parks operate 82 Group A and 5 Group B water systems. One-third of State Park's water systems are due for sanitary survey this year. The State Parks Maintenance Conference occurs every two years and is a great venue for ODW to connect and provide technical assistance for annual start-ups, maintenance, and emergency response.

ODW also participated in the following workshops and conferences:

- Each Regional Office supported a Day w/DOH hosted by a subsection of the PNWS-AWWA.
- The PNWS-AWWA Annual Conference.
- ERWoW Annual Conference.
- ERWoW Fall Conference.
- IACC Annual Conference.
- WOW Conference.
- WPUDA Conference.
- WASWD Conference.
- Washington Cross-connection Control Professionals Annual Seminar.
- Spokane Regional CCC Chapter of ABPA Annual Workshop.
- Western Washington Short School and Trade Show.
- Washington State Environmental Health Association Annual Seminar.
- Washington State Public Health Association Annual Conference.

Area-Wide Optimization Program (AWOP)

As a participant in EPA's Area Wide Optimization Program (AWOP), our vision is to protect public health by assuring that surface water treatment facilities are properly designed, constructed, staffed, operated, and maintained. The training, tools, and networking we receive through AWOP participation yields enormous benefits to our staff, utility operators, and drinking water consumers. The fall 2023 workshop focused on the new EPA corrosion control treatment (CCT) performance and monitoring goals. We are also participating in the workgroup to develop the corrosion control treatment performance and monitoring goals as well as the optimization assessment spreadsheet (OAS) that will be used to help systems optimize corrosion control treatment. The new program being developed by the CCT workgroup will provide our staff with additional tools to help water systems optimize corrosion control. The Spring 2024 workshop focused on chemical feed procedures.

Every other year EPA holds the National AWOP meeting in Cincinnati. We sent one staff person to attend the national meeting in August 2023. The theme for the meeting was 'AWOP Coming of Age'. During the meeting our staff co-led a small group discussion topic on AWOP Staffing that discussed challenges and tips on maintaining AWOP staffing.

Each year we recognize water utilities that meet voluntary turbidity goals based on national goals established by AWOP. Low turbidity means better water treatment and better public health protection. We review turbidity data submitted by all 56 rapid rate treatment plants and present bronze, silver, gold, and platinum certificates or plaques to systems the first time they meet the turbidity goals for three, five, ten, fifteen, and twenty consecutive years. Based on plant performance from 2001 to 2023, we have given 113 awards and recognized 40 individual systems.

Prioritized Compliance Strategy

Our compliance strategy ensures compliance efforts address the highest public health risks first. We notify water systems when they violate a regulation and inform them of corrective actions to return to compliance. We provide training and outreach to help systems find appropriate solutions, as well as issue formal enforcement compliance agreements to return water systems to compliance. Many of these requirements include developing TMF capacity such as completing planning documents and hiring a certified operator.

When water systems are unable or unwilling to comply with regulations, we support the water system in restructuring (either voluntarily or by court ordered receivership) or consolidation. Small water systems often struggle financially as there are fewer households to support the overall cost of maintaining and improving their water system. These costs include the capital financing to periodically replace physical assets such as wells, pumps, distribution mains, and reservoirs when they reach the end of their useful life. In addition, maintenance, monitoring, and personnel costs also tend to be much higher per household for small systems.

Two long-time struggling water systems were restructured by court order receivership. Hunters Water District was unable to comply with safe drinking water regulations (arsenic MCL exceedances) and Stevens County actively sought receivership. Our ERO staff continues to work with Stevens County as they prepare their report to the court recommending the water system's future ownership and operation. Coxville Water Association #1 was unable to comply with safe drinking water regulations (nitrate MCL exceedances) and Benton County was named receiver of the water system. Our staff are working closely with Benton County

to determine the next steps as this system now has less than 15 connections and may not be federally regulated.

As a result of these challenges, we work to support the consolidation of small water systems in urban and peri-urban areas with larger water systems that have more established TMF capacity to sustain the safe and reliable provision of drinking water. However, consolidation is not a feasible option for many small and more rural water systems. In rural areas, restructuring a water system into different ownership is another option. Public and private entities owning multiple water systems can improve the individual water systems TMF capacity by increasing the economy of scale to these water systems.

The Consolidation Feasibility Study Grant provides funding to community water systems to study the feasibility of owning, maintaining, or serving smaller, struggling water systems serving ten thousand or fewer people. DWSRF implements the Consolidation Feasibility Study Grant Program on a year-round basis. Maximum grant award amounts are $50,000. DWSRF has received six applications totaling over $300,000 and continues to work with water systems and industry groups to promote the funding.

An example of using compliance data to identify communities in need of capacity development is our work with the Marble water system. Marble is an unincorporated community in Stevens County with water system compliance challenges relating to source approval, sampling, and capacity. Our eastern regional office staff spent a considerable amount of time working with Marble Water system and members of the community to address compliance challenges. Staff held an in-person community meeting, with 29 people in person and about 19 people attending remotely. After this meeting the community officially contacted us to request RCAC technical support for their water system. We continue to support this system's return to compliance.

Staff met with the departments of Ecology and Commerce, and Pend Oreille County commissioners to discuss the Town of Cusick water and wastewater compliance challenges. The town faces multiple issues, and the goal of the meeting was to identify ways to leverage and coordinate more regionalized efforts to obtain funding and ensure action is taken to return to compliance. Different stakeholders presented challenges, and the group identified several next steps, including applications for funding to support this water system in returning to compliance.

2. *Based on the existing system strategy, how has the State continued to identify systems in need of capacity development assistance?*

We use annual operating permit color, compliance data, sanitary surveys, and planning documents to identify systems that need capacity development assistance. We continue to work with our regional offices to identify systems that need TMF assistance through sanitary surveys, special purpose investigations, routine contact, and emergency response work. We target assistance for these systems through our technical assistance providers and regional office and headquarters staff. We are researching the ability of our available data management systems to track system capacity.

Annual Operating Permits

Every year, DOH issues all Group A public water systems an operating permit after they pay their annual fee statement. We provide a color-coded permit to each water system. We outline the criteria for each color on our Enforcing Drinking Water Regulations webpage. The colors indicate how well the system is meeting the requirements of its operating permit. It also is a way for us to share water system performance

information with customers, lenders, local permitters, and other partners. Table 3 below provides information on the permit color of public water systems. The 2023 permit numbers are a snapshot of the permit color as of 05/27/24. We use this information in part to help select which water systems we offer technical assistance to from third party providers like RCAC.

We maintain a Drinking Water Systems Under Advanced Enforcement webpage with information about water systems currently with red operating permits. A red operating permit category indicates that the water system is inadequate. We also share on the webpage that a red operating permit could result in the water system having difficulty with building permits, on-site sewage disposal permits, food service permits, liquor licenses, and other permits or licenses being denied for properties connected to or intending to connect to the water system. In addition, lending institutions may choose not to finance loans associated with these properties.

Water systems with red, blue, and yellow permits are offered additional technical assistance and are a high priority for our capacity development program.

Table 6: Water System Permit Color Summary by Year

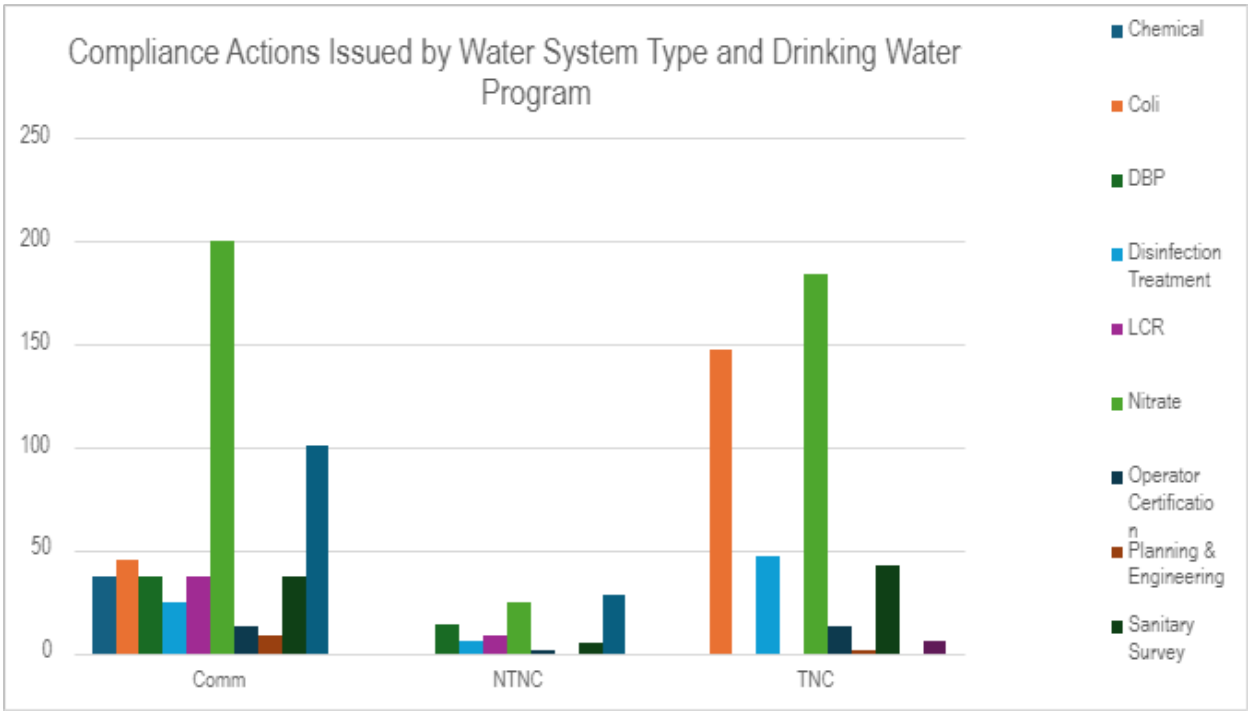
	Permit Color			
Year	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red
2021	3,132	18	921	26
2022	3,150	17	954	25
2023	3,143	17	946	24

Compliance Data

Systems with health-based violations, other MCL violations, and PFAS state action level exceedances are notified of these violations and provided information on how to return to compliance. Our staff work closely with these systems to determine any capacity development needs. Many small water systems do not have the TMF capacity to address new challenges and emergencies.

The Compliance Assurance and Enforcement staff issued 1,070 formal enforcement documents between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. Of the 1,070 formal enforcement documents issued to water systems 51 percent were issued to community water systems and 41 percent were issued to transient non-community water systems. Table 7 shows the number of enforcement documents issued by drinking water program and water system type.

Table 7: Number of Enforcement Documents Issued



Over the last year, ODW staff issued the most formal enforcement documents for nitrate program violation (38 percent of the formal enforcement documents issued). Further data shows that between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, forty-five (45) water systems have had sixty-nine (69) nitrate program violations. Table 8 shows that the majority of the violations were Nitrate MCL violations at TNCs. Additional capacity development is necessary to ensure once nitrate treatment is installed the treatment is monitored and maintained to continued public health protection. The compliance data also highlights the need for the program to adjust the State Significant Non-Complier (SSNC) trigger for seasonal nitrate exceeders.

Table 8: Nitrate Violation Type

Type of Violation	Community	NTNC	TNC	Total
MCL Exceedance	13	6	29	48
Monitoring and Reporting Violation	5		16	21
Grand Total	**18**	**6**	**45**	**69**

Additionally, TNCs are much more likely to receive enforcement documents due to coliform violations. Seventy-seven percent of the coliform enforcement documents are issued to TNCs mostly due to continuous monitoring and reporting violations. TNC's are also less likely to have a certified operator; however, our regulations do require TNCs to hire a certified operator after being designated a SSNC, if they have a treatment plant, or they are required to install 4-log disinfection system. Capacity development and outreach is necessary to ensure these small systems maintain compliance.

Our regional office staff work one-on-one with systems to help them understand how to return to compliance. This may include providing on-site hands-on training to new surface water treatment plant

operators with support from Evergreen Rural Water of Washington (ERWOW) circuit riders. Community meetings are set up to help communities and their customers work together to find solutions. Our planners work with homeowner association boards to help them understand and address issues.

When systems need additional support to become eligible for DWSRF loans, we may offer planning and engineering loans, attend meetings to evaluate consolidation or restructuring, and provide third-party technical assistance through our technical assistance contracts.

3. *During the reporting period, if statewide PWS capacity concerns or capacity development needs (TMF) have been identified, what was the State's approach in offering and/or providing assistance?*

Small System TMF Capacity

We continue to have capacity concerns about our small water systems statewide. These systems are more likely to have water quality issues and water quality monitoring violations and are less likely to successfully address emerging contaminants, climate change, drought and other emergencies. We continue to provide the following assistance and support to these systems.

- Support during coliform and health advisory situations, including developing action plans with water systems and communicating with labs, LHJs, and the media.
- Technical assistance to small water systems on water quality, source water protection, cross-connection control, and engineering issues.
- Managerial and financial capacity assistance through contracts with RCAC, SCI, and other technical assistance providers.
- Targeted financial technical assistance to improve small systems' financial capacity and position them to apply successfully for funding opportunities.
- Leveraging state and federal funding opportunities to undertake consolidation feasibility studies, promote regionalization and consolidation through providing bonus points in the DWSRF application process for infrastructure projects resulting in these outcomes, and work with systems to develop the technical, managerial and fiscal capacity necessary to support the integration of water systems within a challenged area.
- Utilize opportunities tied to the identification of emerging contaminants or more frequent and worsening drought occurrences to promote consolidation and regionalization through alternative source and infrastructure development or system integration tied to treatment needs, with a primary focus on the efficient use of state and federal funding resources to achieve communitywide outcomes instead of more limited individualized and piecemeal solutions.

The greatest challenge we work to address is the lack of capacity of small systems. Some of them are not able to provide oversight to an infrastructure project that meets all of the federal crosscutters. In addition, others cannot provide updated information on their water system plan or small water system management program to demonstrate their capacity to maintain the infrastructure and pay back a loan. We are currently finalizing technical assistance contracts to provide services for contract management oversight, engineering/design support, and water system planning support for these utilities in 2024.

Aging Infrastructure

The most recent needs assessment highlighted our concern about aging infrastructure and ensuring water systems are funding the right project at the right time. The requirement for all water systems to undertake long term and consistent water system planning is a tremendous success to help communities understand their TMF needs both now and into the future. Explicitly including asset management enables us to help utilities better understand limitations of their infrastructure and consider costs of maintenance, repair, and replacement.

Unfortunately, water systems are more likely to identify grants as the funding source to address many of the projects listed in their capital improvement plans without continued regulatory oversight to guide them towards more diverse funding solutions. While the bipartisan infrastructure law (BIL) has provided an influx of funding to improve the infrastructure in our state, much of this funding will be provided as a loan and not subsidy. We continue to utilize state and federal set aside funding to provide subsidy and grant assistance for small and disadvantaged communities while also providing technical assistance for rate studies to understand the water system operating costs and needed reserves for future improvements and unexpected emergencies.

In addition to ensuring water systems are charging for the full cost of providing water, we understand that increased costs impact low-income customers who are most vulnerable to rate increases. We continue to provide resources for customer assistance programs on our website and will undertake an assessment and recommendations of a state-run utility rate assistance program in the next year. Additionally, we continue to participate in affordability discussions at the state and federal levels to address proper rate structures, the provision of subsidy to well positioned systems servicing disadvantaged communities, and possible rebate programs to benefit ratepayers experiencing economic hardship. Per the language in BIL, we reassessed and chose to update the definition of disadvantaged community in 2024 with formal rulemaking filed May 17, 2024. This definition change clarifies those disadvantaged communities eligible for subsidy under the DWSRF and allows the program to more effectively target technical assistance to communities needing to improve their technical, managerial and financial governance and direct funding to systems that serve disadvantaged populations.

Climate Change

Impacts of climate change on our water systems continues to be a water system capacity concern. Drought, flooding, and wildfires threaten water systems in our state every year. This was also highlighted in a new legislative requirement that climate resilience be a part of our water system planning process. Our updated Capacity Development Strategy considers the long-term impacts of climate change on utilities. This year we dovetailed our strategy into the once-in-a-decade Washington State Interagency Climate Resilience Strategy led by the Department of Ecology to continue to advocate for funding and programs that support capacity building of drinking water systems and the natural resource management to prepare for future drinking water scarcity, water quality degradation, and infrastructure impacts.

Our office is working with partners to implement a new state requirement for Group A community water systems serving 1,000 or more connections to include a climate resiliency element in their Water System Plans. These water systems will need to determine which extreme weather events pose significant challenges to their systems and assess critical assets and the actions necessary to protect them. We completed the rulemaking this year to establish the requirements and are now focusing on developing information to add to our Water System Plan Guidance.

We continue to provide emergency response support to water systems during emergencies and provide information to water system customers about how to protect themselves during emergencies. We developed a library of emergency response social media posts for flooding, drought, and wildfires so we could quickly post information such as how to properly boil water in an emergency.

One emergency condition that often emerges in Washington during the late spring or summer is drought. In April of 2024, the Department of Ecology issued a drought declaration for all of Washington state. Low snowpack and forecasts for a dry and warm spring and summer prompted the declaration. Ecology updated their Drought Response webpage, and we updated our Drought 2024 webpage and sent a bulletin to water systems throughout the state. During a drought emergency, we:

- Work with the Governor's Office, the Department of Ecology, and other state agencies to monitor drought impacts on water supplies.
- Provide technical assistance to at-risk water systems, including helping them apply for emergency grants.
- Help water systems manage and conserve water and restore safe and reliable water if shortages or outages occur.
- Educate water systems, operators, and consumers about what they can do to ensure an adequate water supply for people, agriculture, businesses, and fish.

In addition, we work to support proactive projects to build resiliency, develop sustainable infrastructure, and be more responsive to water supply demands now and into the future because declarations of drought are occurring more frequently. Our DWSRF program has additional funding that supports many climate resilience projects for utilities.

Source Water Protection and Emerging Contaminants

Increasing population growth continues to push development into areas where we believed our drinking water sources would be protected. Ensuring source water protection measures are in place to protect vulnerable drinking water sources is essential. We continue to support source water protection by:

- Reviewing updates to local critical aquifer recharge areas and other local ordinances.
- Providing technical assistance through conference training sessions.
- Providing direct assistance from our source water protection program.
- Updating and developing new source water protection guidance.

Washington regulations required PFAS sampling of all community and NTNC water systems in January 2023. Voluntary sampling began in 2023. We continue to identify elevated levels of regulated PFAS in groundwater across the state.

In 2024, we continued to provide information to the public about PFAS with our PFAS Testing Results Dashboard webpage. The dashboard shows which water systems have sampled for PFAS, levels detected, and if the water system has taken action to reduce levels of PFAS in their drinking water. We provided technical assistance to water systems with elevated PFAS and to local health jurisdictions to support communications and evaluate mitigation options.

ODW joined an EPA grant effort focused on pollution prevention in October 2023. A strategic plan is being created to prevent PFAS from getting into the environment to protect public health. ODW facilitates a targeted work group with technical experts across EPA Region 8, 9 and 10 looking at source water protection tools to assess PFAS risk and susceptibility, A white paper on prevention strategies for public water systems is in draft form and we are preparing a fact sheet for local community officials with a focus on data visualization.

We are working with the Washington State Department of Ecology on a legislative report on an emerging contaminant 6-ppd quinone, an anti-ozonate found in car tires that has been linked to acute salmon mortality. Stormwater runoff has been studied and high concentrations of 6-ppd are correlated with high-traffic roadways. ODW is working on a project to help the Washington State Department of Transportation evaluate retrofit opportunities that mitigate stormwater runoff near public water supply intakes. The science on the persistence of 6-ppd in the environment and human health risks via drinking water are unclear so this work is being done in the spirit of the precautionary principle.

4. *If the State performed a review of implementation of the existing systems strategy during the previous year, discuss the review and how findings have been or may be addressed.*

During 2023, we successfully completed an update to our capacity development strategy, responding to two decades of changes in the drinking water industry. The document, *Washington's Drinking Water Strategy* 331-703, creates a comprehensive strategic framework for improving drinking water capacity by identifying the processes we use to make statewide and programmatic decisions. These processes mandate the development of statewide goals, planned program activity, measurement of trends, and consultation with affected communities.

Using this updated approach, ODW will respond to industry-wide challenges, including aging infrastructure, affordability, emerging contaminants, climate change, and workforce depletion. As we implement the strategy, we will develop new tools to address these challenges, including asset management, pursuing environmental justice, developing peer networks, greater consumer engagement, and increasing equity, diversity, and inclusion in our workforce and decisions.

5. *Did the State make any modifications to the existing system strategy? If so, describe.*

No, we are now in the first year of implementing our revised capacity development strategy and are continuing the work to assess the impact of our strategies in the capacity of our public water systems. This work has been complicated with the addition and proposal of many new federal regulations and funding opportunities, so the story has become more complex.

Successes and Challenges

A. Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Success Stories

We have three success stories to share related to the work of our DWSRF team. The first is about Johnson Creek Water Users Association in Okanogan County, which served 27 homes outside of the city of Omak. Their wells were impacted by arsenic, nitrate, uranium, pesticides, and organic chemicals above the maximum contaminant levels (MCL) with total dissolved solids above the secondary MCL. The source had a history of failure during peak summer demands. Duck Lake Water Association volunteered to extend their water main three miles to serve the Johnson Creek residents in 2023. Duck Lake received two grants and a loan for a total of $1,136,422 since the project consolidated a troubled water system. Two grants were federal EPA Small Underserved and Disadvantaged Community grants, and the loan was a Washington state DWSRF Loan with 100 percent loan principal forgiveness. The residents of Johnson Creek now receive safe and reliable drinking water from Duck Lake.

The second success story involves Treneer Water Company and Treneer Addition Water Company, both Group B water systems in Yakima County. The distribution systems of both water companies had coliform issues for years. All three wells serving the two systems were decommissioned and a 2,500-foot water main was extended to provide water from Yakima County's Terrace Heights water system in 2023. The county received two grants totaling more than $714,300 since the project consolidated two troubled water systems. One grant was a federal EPA Small Underserved and Disadvantaged Community grant, and the other was a Washington State Drinking Water System Rehabilitation and Consolidation grant. The residents of the Treneer area now receive safe and reliable drinking water from Yakima County's Terrace Heights water system.

Finally, Clear Creek Mobile Home Park's well was contaminated by PFAS from usage of AFFF at the nearby Naval Base. A water line from the Silverdale Water District No. 16 ran along the frontage of the park. In 2023, Silverdale Water District received a Washington State Consolidation Feasibility Study Grant of $50,000 to cover a portion of the connection fee to connect the mobile home park to the district's distribution main. The mobile home park residents now receive safe and reliable drinking water from the Silverdale Water District No. 16 water system.

B. Assisting Struggling Water Systems

When needed, we are ready to provide technical assistance to struggling water systems and help with coordination between the systems, counties, cities, and other partners to identify and implement solutions. Below are seven examples of our recent work to support struggling water systems:

1. City of Mabton (49650-R, Yakima County): The city has been struggling with taste and odor issues that stem from naturally occurring hydrogen sulfide in the city's wells. Eastern Regional staff have provided ongoing technical assistance as the city explores possible maintenance practices that could reduce the aesthetic effects of hydrogen sulfide in their drinking water.

   ODW's eastern regional engineer attended a listening session at the city of Mabton on November 15. As reported in September 2023, the Eastern Regional engineer has been providing technical assistance on proper operations and maintenance (O&M) activities aimed at reducing taste and odor problems and working with Ecology to conduct more water testing. City personnel have been

doing recommended O&M, and complaints about taste and odor have lessened. The listening session included an interactive activity for residents to report whether they are currently experiencing taste and odor issues, and where they live in the city, so the city can target its O&M procedures accordingly. There were very few, if any, reports of continuing taste and odor issues. The O&M procedures appear to be effective.

ODW Eastern Regional Office staff met with Mabton Mayor Rachel Reulas and other interagency staff on Dec. 18, 2023, to discuss the challenges surrounding the taste and odor problems with the Mabton water. Mayor Reulas noted that the town is flushing their water system, which appears to have greatly reduced the smell, taste, and appearance issues. Sampling results ruled out other possible contamination that could cause ill health and cause taste, odor, and appearance issues. Next steps include a future community listening session with City of Mabton, ODW, and Ecology staff present.

ERO staff attended a community listening session in Mabton coordinated by Empowering Latina Leadership & Action (ELLA). Community members expressed concern about taste and odor problems with the water that are so severe that people do not want to drink or use it, regardless of whether it is a health hazard. Community members expressed concern that the process of putting in a new well is taking too long. They asked that local, state, and federal governments find immediate solutions while they wait for the new well to start producing water. Bottled water is currently distributed at the Mabton Food Bank and the Yakima Herald ran an article alerting citizens.

2. Sun Tides Mobile Home Community, LLC (86280, Yakima County): On November 10, 2022, The Sun Tides water system had an *E. coli* detection in the distribution system. ODW ERO staff followed up on November 11, 2022, with the water system to have repeat samples taken from the distribution system and Groundwater Rule (GWR) samples from the well. The Coliform samples were taken on November 11, 2022, and reported back to our Eastern Regional office on November 12, 2022. The repeat samples from the distribution system were satisfactory or negative. The samples from S01 (raw water) were positive for coliform. Sampling and documentation of the site progressed over the next few days. On November 18, 2022, sampling indicated another E. coli detection, and a health advisory was issued for the water system.

   ERO staff completed a Special Purpose investigation (SPI) on November 22, 2022. Corrections were cited for the owners to complete. Notable corrections included mitigation for the septic system, located within the Sanitary Control Area (SCA) for S01, and also included investigation of the septic lines since the bathroom and laundry room were also in the sanitary control area. In the event the issue could not be mitigated or triggered source water samples detected additional concerns in S01, they were directed to evaluate and design a treatment system that can disinfect and achieve a CT of 6. The system determined they would evaluate the existing disinfection system and install the necessary improvements. They were chlorinating with sodium hypochlorite using a simple injector pump. Triggered source water samples would be required for two years to ensure S01 was not impacted by surface influences.

   On December 6, 2022, *E. coli* was again detected in S01 from the Triggered source water assessment samples. Additional samples were required from S01 to confirm the *E. coli* detection, and 4 of the 5 samples were confirmed TC+ (Total Coliform Positive) and one of those was EC+ (*E. coli* Positive). This triggered a new Boil Water Advisory and SPI from the Eastern Regional office.

On December 8, 2022, the system determined they would begin purchasing materials to install the additional storage so the treatment system could achieve 4-log inactivation for viruses. Because the issue was confirmed *E. coli* in the well, the disinfection requirement was upgraded to 4-log. In the groundwater system the change in temperature and Ph is relatively minor and the chlorine residual to achieve CT-6 and 4-log is similar. The difference is the chlorine residual monitoring and certified operator requirement, which the system can achieve. The water system worked with the ERO engineer to determine which improvements were needed and project approval. The system was approved on September 29, 2023. On March 15, 2024, ERO received the construction completion report noting the 4-log treatment project was complete. After sample results were negative for *E. coli*, we lifted the health advisory on March 22, 2024.

3. In Pierce County, Bethel Green Acres successfully reached a compliance milestone. They successfully transferred ownership to another utility with a proven record of TMF capacity. The stewards of the struggling HOA ownership were awarded a DOH Drinking Water Week award.

4. Lake Bay Marina, a privately held marina that serves water to the public in Pierce County, also reached a compliance milestone. The marina is in a beautiful, yet depressed area in need of major investment. The marina and water system owner served water from a well that was highly vulnerable to contamination and had both biological and organic chemical risks in the sanitary control area. A changing business climate, a ready purchaser, and ongoing enforcement on the water system owner led to a transfer of ownership to a land stewardship entity. The marina and park are now closed, but with the hope of new investment and revival in the future.

5. Hannah Heights Owners Association Water System: The Hannah Heights Owners Association water system serves 43 residential connections. In April 2023, PFAS compounds were detected at about 700 times the State Action Levels and new EPA MCLs. The source was immediately taken off-line. Department of Commerce funding was identified to pay for trucking in water from an adjacent water system. Volunteers in the community have worked thousands of hours seeking DWSRF; Department of Agriculture Rural Development Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants; and State Legislature appropriations to drill a new well, replace contaminated infrastructure, and clean up the site. ODW staff, together with staff from the Department of Commerce Small Communities Initiative have helped to facilitate loans and grants to get the work done. The Department of Ecology has listed the site as a cleanup site under the Model Toxics Control Act. The work to finalize funding is continuing so the project can get started and eventually eliminate the need for trucked water. With luck, a new well is expected to be drilled in the coming months.

6. Department of Social and Health Services Western State Hospital: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operates the Western State Hospital for adults with serious or long-term mental illness with more than 800 beds and 2,500 employees. DSHS also operates the public water system serving the hospital campus with 73 buildings. Drinking water infrastructure on the campus has reached the end of its useful life. Escherichia Coli (*E.coli*) and Legionella were detected in the distribution system and Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS compounds) were recently detected in one of the two wells on campus. The campus is surrounded by a larger municipal water district that is willing and able to provide direct service. Unfortunately, water rights (transferring legal access to the water) are complicated and the condition of aging infrastructure greatly delayed consolidation. In the meantime, DSHS hopes to build a new 500 bed hospital on the same site. For years, we worked closely with DSHS, the adjacent water district, and sister agencies to help facilitate future consolidation. Hundreds of millions of dollars of legislative

appropriation is needed to complete water right transfer, replace aging infrastructure, and consolidate the hospital campus into the adjacent water district.

7. Holiday Hills Community Club water system: The Holiday Hills Community Club water system serves 58 residential connections. The community received a DWSRF loan to replace an inadequate well and failing infrastructure. On-going troubles with declining source capacity, low pressure, E. coli contamination, and governance issues led the community to near default on the loan. ODW staff, together with Department of Commerce Small Communities Initiative, helped re-engage local leadership to improve managerial and financial capacity. A new board was elected, new bylaws drafted, and new billing practices implemented. DWSRF loans were refinanced to avoid default. A Source Water Protection Grant was given to study hydrogeologic conditions to support drilling of a future new well.

C. PFAS timing with EPA and State limits/MCL

Washington state passed State Action Levels (SAL) for five PFAS compounds in 2021. This reporting period encompasses the second year of the three-year initial monitoring period for PFAS in public water systems. This is an important work effort to discover and support communities across our state impacted by PFAS. This information led to a more informed public, understanding of frequency and locations of impact, and in many cases, actions taken to reduce PFAS exposure. Specific communication, recommendations and information regarding PFAS in Washington can be found at our PFAS | Washington State Department of Health website.

Our work aligns with the recent announcement of the PFAS maximum contaminant levels (MCL) released by EPA. EPA's decision to finalize the National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for PFAS reflects a significant stride toward addressing a pressing environmental and public health concern, with implications extending far beyond regulatory compliance. We have been successful at strategically working with our requirements, so they help utilities meet the initial monitoring requirements under the federal rule as well. We also worked to leverage federal funding to both provide relief for initial sampling costs and PFAS treatment.

This has been a collaborative effort with our Environmental Public Health Sciences (OEPHS) division as well as our Office of Public Affairs and Equity (communications support) and ODW.

We have a diverse approach to addressing the issue focusing on communication, technical assistance, and funding to support Washington communities. We met with individual utilities, local communities, and held a 2-day conference in support of understanding both the associated challenges and potential solutions for PFAS contamination. We made information available and transparent about the PFAS concentration found in Washington state through our required monitoring. Those results can be seen online PFAS Testing Results Dashboard | Washington State Department of Health.

Communication efforts have been a priority to support public health.

In response to EPA's PFAS MCLs in Drinking Water announcement, various teams and individuals within DOH, including ODW, OEPHS, Health Promotion and Education (HPE), Public Information Officer (PIO), social media, Web, and EPH Communications teams, were actively involved in preparing comprehensive communication strategies to disseminate information about the new regulations long before it made national and regional news.

The DOH PFAS team received many positive messages from partners both internally and externally after the successful collaboration on PFAS work:

- “I’d like to thank those working on PFAS at DOH for your tireless effort in establishing Washington as a leader and laying the groundwork for this national action,” said John Lovie, community advocate from Whidbey Island.

- “I have loved being part of a group of colleagues who have taken an idea, put passion behind it and made it come to life. Claire Nitsche, Teresa Lohr, Barb Morrissey, Mike Means, Tim Schlender, and I all worked together on a tight deadline to bring our PFAS Media Resources Webpage to life,” said Kara. “The important work Barb, Claire, and Mike do daily centers around PFAS, and it’s been fun to present their vast knowledge in way we hope helps journalists share the story with accuracy.”

- The collaboration and commitment to PFAS outreach and education were further commended by Laura Johnson, OEPHS director. "Very grateful to the expertise that Barb and Claire have brought to the release of the PFAS MCLs. Their ability to anticipate people’s concerns and speak to the science in a way that is informative and accessible is unparalleled," remarked Laura, underscoring the invaluable contributions of Barb and Claire in communicating the science behind PFAS regulations effectively to address public concerns.

- Rhonda Kaetzel, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Region 10 Director, praised DOH’s efforts. “I think DOH is awesome. Really good work and collaboration across programs. What I see? Be first, be right, be credible (it takes all three). You expressed empathy, promoted action, and showed respect. Boom.” Kaetzel said.

- Holly Myers, ODW director also praised the team’s efforts. Myers acknowledged the invaluable contributions of experts such as Barb Morrissey and Mike Means in effectively communicating the science behind PFAS regulations and raising awareness among the public and agency staff. "The collaboration and commitment to PFAS outreach and education from Mike Means and Barb Morrissey is testament to the success achievable by working across programs and offices. Their work to educate staff and our public allows improved health awareness to our entire agency and the residents of Washington," said Myers.

- “PFAS are an emerging environmental health contaminant of concern, which means that our understanding of their health impacts and their environmental reach is developing rapidly. Much like with the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, our impacted communities are caught in the middle of uncertainty and a swath of different advice from different sources, which can make the path forward difficult to see. Our DOH experts are true leaders in the field in providing up to date health advice and support. Together we are stepping up to walk alongside our water systems, local health departments, and impacted communities and navigate this path together. “Team PFAS” is proud to continue to elevate their voices and ensure their needs and lived experiences are centered in our work,” said Claire.

- Commenting on the impact of PFAS contamination on individuals and communities, Claire Nitsche, HPE's PFAS Health Educator, emphasized the far-reaching consequences beyond mere water safety concerns. She highlighted the anxiety, stress, and sense of loss experienced by affected individuals and families. “An important thing to understand is that living with PFAS in your water can have a tremendous impact on your life. It goes well beyond wondering if you can get a safe glass of water: it brings up anxiety about health concerns amidst our rapidly developing understanding of PFAS health impacts, stress from having to figure out how to get safe water for yourself and your children, a realization of how ingrained into our lives these chemicals are via consumer products, and for many a deep sense of loss that they no longer know if they can safely grow foods or raise livestock at home to feed their families,” said Claire.

ODW Holds Successful PFAS Conference

To meet a legislative request, ODW coordinated and hosted a statewide technical conference on PFAS, as follow-up on a June webinar. This free, two-day conference focused on drinking water issues on the first day, and wastewater issues the second day. The purpose of the event was to give public water systems a better sense of the state of practice around PFAS in Washington.

The conference included breakout room discussions to help characterize the needs and ongoing challenges of the audience. There were 497 people who registered for the event and attended. For the discussions, around 100 people participated the first day and 50 were able to participate the second day. State agencies, local governments, and public health districts working on PFAS will use the discussion summaries to guide future planning and training opportunities. ODW appreciates the time and careful thought the audience put into the breakout room discussions.

Technical Assistance

March 2024: Northwest Regional Office staff and the DWSRF manager attended the San Juan Island Hannah Heights PFAS mitigation meeting March 13. Chris Pettit, DWSRF Manager, presented on how to proceed with the state direct appropriation. Hannah Heights had one of the highest levels of PFAS found in drinking water in the state. PFAS is in the news a lot lately because they are a family of man-made chemicals that do not break down easily, known as “forever” chemicals. Learn more on our PFAS webpage.

Next Steps

In 2023, we continued to meet challenges and celebrate successes as we supported water systems to address TMF capacity. Our Drinking Water Strategy, which we updated in 2022, is in line with our vision of supporting our communities to address competing water challenges, such as climate change, water resources, aging infrastructure, and economic development. The updated strategy focuses on the strengths of what we’ve built and looks to address the increasing challenges utilities face today like aging infrastructure, climate change, and workforce challenges. We look forward to continuing to implement our updated Strategy to better support water system capacity development through the diverse approaches outlined in the strategy.