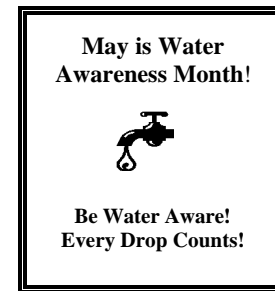




Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996



There is no doubt that the quality of our public drinking water has improved since the passage of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974. "For the most part, water treated by the state's 767 public systems and piped to homes and businesses is considered safe."¹ However, this does not mean that improvements are not needed.

President Clinton signed the *Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996* in August. The passage of these amendments will bring substantial changes to the national drinking water program impacting individual water utilities and states as well as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These changes should bring greater protection and information to the 240 million Americans served by public water systems.

The amendments deal with four basic areas. The one basic theme running through all areas is a shift from federal to more state control and management.

! **New and stronger approaches to prevent drinking water contamination**

✍ Greater attention is to be given to source water protection and enhanced water system management. Within 18 months, states (Kentucky Division of Water [DOW]) must submit a program for identifying source water areas of public water systems, and for assessing the susceptibility of such source waters to contamination. These results will provide individual systems with information to seek help from the state in protecting source water.

✍ States (DOW) must develop a plan to ensure that *new* water systems have sufficient technical, managerial and financial capacity to meet drinking water standards. Within this plan must be a strategy to identify and assist *existing* water systems needing improvements in managerial, technical, or financial capacity, or aid in complying with the standards.

✍ States (DOW) must implement a new and/or enforce an existing state program to certify operators of public systems. Every system must have at least one operator who is trained and certified (Kentucky is already doing this).

! **Better consumer information to consumers - "right-to-know" strategy**

✍ Much emphasis is being placed on involving the consumer in safe drinking water by keeping them informed. Public support is vital to address and prevent growing threats to drinking water quality in the future.

¹ 1996 *State of Kentucky's Environment*, "Safe Drinking Water," Environmental Quality Commission, June 1996.

✍ Within two years, all community water systems must prepare and mail to each consumer at least once a year a report with information about the system's water source and the level of contaminants in the drinking water. Depending on the size of the system, the governor may allow small systems to publish the report in the newspaper or give effective public notice that the report is available, rather than mail it.

✍ Other provisions to inform consumers include: 1) public water systems must give notice (within 24 hours after the violation) of any violation of a national drinking water standard that has the potential to have serious adverse effects on human health as a result of short term exposure; and 2) each state's triennial report to the Governor on the effectiveness of and progress under the capacity development strategy must also be available to the public.

! Improvements in the regulatory element (better science, risk assessment, etc.)

✍ The requirement that EPA regulate an additional 25 contaminants every three years has been eliminated. In place of this, EPA has the flexibility to decide whether or not to regulate a contaminant after completing a required review of at least five contaminants every 5 years. EPA must use three criteria to determine whether or not to regulate: 1) the contaminant must adversely affect human health, 2) it is known or is likely to occur in public water systems, and 3) regulation of the contaminant presents a meaningful opportunity for health risk reduction. EPA will work in partnership with the state (DOW), the local water systems, environmental and public health groups, etc. to identify and scrutinize unregulated contaminants most prevalent in drinking water that present the most serious threat to health.

✍ A national occurrence database covering regulated and unregulated contaminants will be established.

✍ Standard setting has a new flexibility. EPA must determine whether the costs of a standard will be justified by the benefits. If not, EPA may adjust the MCL to a level that maximizes health benefit at a cost that is justified by the benefits.

✍ Small water systems will be given special considerations and "multiple remedy" options and exemptions when possible.

✍ Compliance time frames are more realistic.

✍ Measures to facilitate more effective enforcement while encouraging compliance.

✍ Radon, arsenic, DBP/cryptosporidium and sulfate are targeted for additional research and assessment.

! New funding for states and communities

✍ A new Drinking Water Revolving Fund (SRF) will be created in the state to assist communities in installing and upgrading systems. There will also be SRF grants available to states with new prevention programs.

References:

Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996, General Guide to Provisions, Environmental Protection Agency, August 1996.

The Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996, Strengthening Protection for America's Drinking Water, (no source listed).

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