Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)/Drinking Water Program (DWP)

In the Main Newsletter – 03/20/2026

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In The Main - The Drinking Water Updates can be found online at the MassDEP Communication to Public Water Suppliers Website or at the Statehouse Archives which has a searchable database.

Bridge of Flowers, Shelburne Falls, MA, Photo by: Historical Perspective 2 (cropped)

This In the Main Newsletter has these topics of interest:

Are you looking for past issues or topics in our *In the Main* newsletter?

Use the search function in the Statehouse Archives Website.

1. Supply Chain Reminders

If your PWS experiences any supply chain issues, including the receipt of a Force Majeure letter from a chemical supplier, the MassDEP/DWP encourages you to report all supply chain issues to your MassDEP regional office Drinking Water Program contact and take the following steps:

- Review your PWS Emergency Response Plans (ERP) required by 310 CMR 22.04(13) and take planned actions identified for such an emergency. This should include any applicable work and conservation practices to extend the currently available supply.
- Implement the steps identified by DWP using the Steps to Prepare Your PWS For Supply Chain Disruptions Flyer and keep MassDEP/DWP informed of all Supply Chain issues.
- Check/Use EPA Chemical Supplier and Manufacturer Locator Tool : This tool allows water and wastewater utilities to search for suppliers and manufacturers across the U.S. that may be able to fulfill their chemical supply needs and increase resilience to supply chain disruptions. This tool can also be useful for finding alternative chemical suppliers in the case of supply chain shortages.
- Join MassWARN.

2. Reporting of Subcontracted Laboratory Services

Additional Documentation Requirements – Reminder

This is a reminder of the additional documentation requirements for your Public Water System (PWS) when reporting water quality data to the Drinking Water Program (DWP) when the laboratory you retain subcontracts out any part of the analytical work.

Subcontracting is the practice of a laboratory forwarding drinking water samples to other laboratories for analysis. This is a common practice that may occur due to the need to address staffing, scheduling or instrumentation issues or to have contaminants tested by a laboratory that holds specific certifications.

The Laboratory Director's signature on the eDEP transaction and/or state reporting form attests to the quality of the laboratory's work and the accuracy of the report. However, when subcontractors are used the principal laboratory will usually complete and sign the MassDEP form listing the subcontractors where required. This practice does not document the analytical work by the laboratories that performed it.

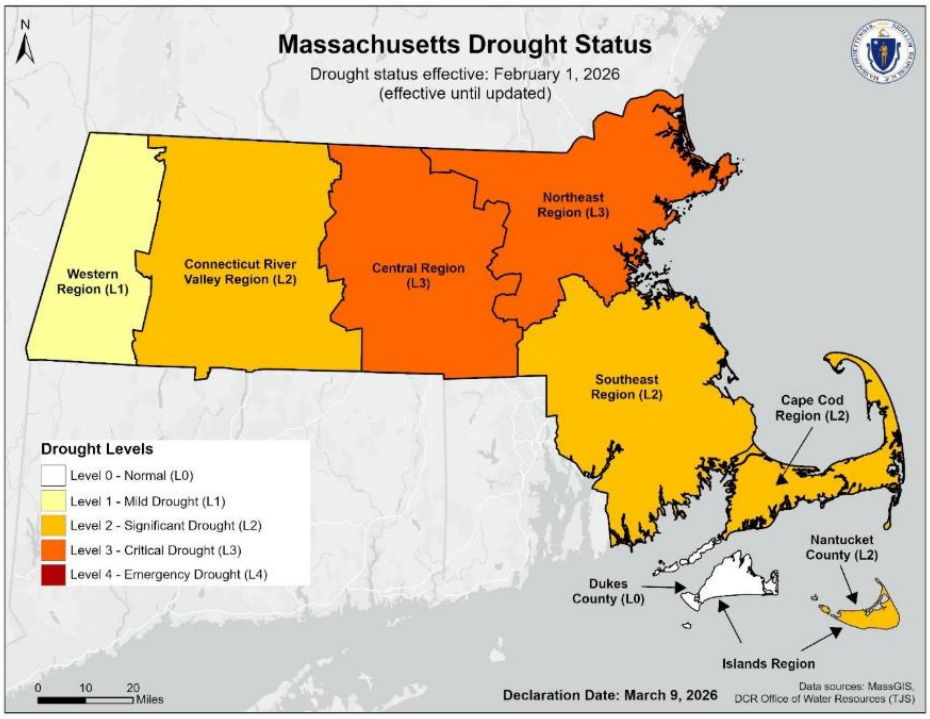
Therefore, MassDEP requires that you attach report(s) showing all the relevant details of the analytical work and bearing the signature(s) of the subcontracting laboratory's director(s) to the eDEP transaction and/or state reporting form.

Although we recognize that these additional submittals may be viewed as burdensome, we believe it necessary to record the analytical work being performed on your behalf.

If you have any questions, please reach out to the Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov, Subject: Subcontracted Laboratory Services.

3. Drought Conditions Worsen Across Massachusetts

On March 9, 2026, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) declared that drought conditions have worsened in several regions of the state due to limited groundwater recharge this winter. The Central and Northeast Regions are now in a Level 3-Critical Drought. The Connecticut River Valley has moved to a Level 2 - Significant Drought, and the Western Region is now in a Level 1 - Mild Drought. Conditions slightly improved in Nantucket County, which is now at a Level 2 - Significant Drought. The Southeast and Cape Cod Regions and Dukes County remain unchanged. Although the state received up to three feet of snow in February, the snowfall has not yet helped improve drought conditions. The most recent drought declaration can be read on the Massachusetts Drought Status webpage.



Drought declarations require detailed monitoring of drought conditions; continued coordination among state and federal agencies to advance the implementation of water use restrictions; and engagement with municipalities, including local Boards of Health, to provide technical outreach and assistance to water suppliers and affected municipalities.

Below is a list of resources for communities to use related to drought outreach and education, water conservation, and drought status monitoring.

- The Massachusetts Drought Dashboard provides regularly updated maps monitoring drought conditions across the state.
- The Drought Alert Flyer provides information about current drought conditions and how communities across the state can help promote water conservation, fire prevention, and drought preparedness.

- The Drought Management in Massachusetts webpage includes several recommendations for residents, businesses, and communities during each level of drought (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4) related to water conservation and fire prevention.
- The Water Resources Toolkit offers many examples of outreach materials for communities to use related to droughts.
- Utilities are encouraged to develop a Drought Management Plan to identify preparedness, monitoring, response, and outreach procedures related to droughts.
- Information for private well owners can be found at the webpage Information for Private Well Owners During a Drought
- Previous issues of In the Main include additional resources related to drought preparedness and response resources.

4. Reminder to PWS on Fish Kills

How to Report Fish Kills to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

This year's cold winter created more ice cover on ponds, decreasing oxygen levels and potentially causing natural fish kills. Most fish kills are caused by natural events, but it is important for biologists to rule out other causes. **Learn how to report a fish kill.**

5. Seasonal Start-Up Tips and Procedures for TNC Public Water Systems

The seasonal start-up period is a critical time for Transient Non-Community (TNC) Public Water Systems to ensure that drinking water provided to the public is safe, reliable, and compliant with state regulations. After extended periods of inactivity, water systems may experience stagnation, loss of disinfectant residual, or potential contamination. Conducting a thorough and methodical start-up process helps mitigate these risks before customers return.

Importance of Seasonal Start-Up

Seasonal start-up provides an opportunity to carefully inspect, test, and prepare your system before it is placed back into service. Systems that are proactively maintained during this period are significantly less likely to experience water quality violations, customer complaints, or emergency repairs during peak operating months.

Failure to properly start up a system can result in:

- Bacterial contamination
- Taste, odor, or discoloration issues
- Regulatory non-compliance

Required Seasonal Start-Up Procedures

All seasonal TNC Public Water Systems in Massachusetts must complete and certify approved start-up procedures prior to serving water to the public. These procedures are designed to verify system integrity and ensure water quality meets drinking water standards.

1. System Inspection

Conduct a comprehensive inspection of all system components, including:

- Source water (wells, springs, or surface intakes)
- Treatment equipment (if applicable)
- Storage tanks and pressure tanks
- Distribution piping
- Pumps, valves, and appurtenances

Look for signs of damage, corrosion, leaks, or unauthorized access. Ensure that all sanitary seals and protective measures are intact.

2. System Integrity Check

Verify that the system is secure and protected from potential contamination sources. This includes:

- Confirming well caps are properly sealed and vent screens are intact
- Ensuring storage tanks are covered and free of openings
- Checking that cross-connections are eliminated or properly controlled
- Identifying any structural vulnerabilities that could allow contaminants to enter

3. Thorough System Flushing

Proper flushing is essential to restoring water quality and preparing the system for sampling.

- Flush the entire distribution system to remove stagnant water and any accumulated sediments or biofilm. Flushing should begin at the source and continue through all outlets.
- Continue until water runs clear and free of discoloration.
- Ensure that fresh water replaces all stagnant water in the system.

4. Coliform Bacteria Sampling

Collect water samples for total coliform bacteria analysis after flushing is complete. Sampling must:

- Be conducted at representative locations within the system
- Follow proper sampling techniques to avoid contamination
- Be analyzed by a state-certified laboratory

Water may only be served to the public after results confirm the absence of coliform bacteria.

Recommended Best Practice: Disinfection

Although not required in all cases, system disinfection is strongly recommended, particularly if:

- The system has been inactive for an extended period
- Repairs or maintenance were performed
- There is any indication of contamination risk

Disinfection typically involves chlorination of the system followed by adequate contact time and post-treatment flushing. This step provides an additional level of protection against microbial contamination.

Certification Requirement

System operators must certify that all required start-up procedures have been completed prior to opening. This certification confirms compliance with Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations and helps ensure public health protection.

Additional Resources

For detailed guidance, certification forms, and checklists, please visit:
Seasonal Start-Up: Information, Certification and Checklist for Non-community systems | Mass.gov

For questions or assistance, contact the MassDEP Drinking Water Program at:
program.director-dwp@mass.gov

6. LCR, LCRR, and LCRI Updates

In-Pipe Testing Verification Method Guidance March 2026 Update!

The In-Pipe Testing Verification Method Guidance has been updated as of March 19, 2026. The purpose of this guidance is to define MassDEP requirements for PWS to use an in-pipe testing technology to verify the material of public and private service lines. This guidance document was last updated in June 2024. The March 2026 updates made to this guidance include:

- Revising the Guidance to also refer to Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI) requirements
- Including definition of magnetic resonance testing as an in-pipe testing method
- Including a Non-Lead Validation Disclaimer.
    - Due to the language of the LCRI, PWS cannot use interior pipe verification methods to conduct Non-Lead Validations.
- Clarifying the required steps PWS must conduct to use in-pipe testing as a verification method, including submitting an in-pipe verification method plan to MassDEP.
- Clarifying that additional steps following testing are required only for service lines confirmed to be lead or GRR following in-pipe testing and requiring consumer notification of the service line material following identification of lead and GRR service lines by in-pipe testing.

The updated guidance document is available here: In-Pipe Testing Guidance for Verifying Unknown Service Lines. A redlined version of the document and included updates is available upon request, by emailing program.director-dwp@mass.gov, subject: In-Pipe Testing Guidance Document.

7. Water Smart

Water-Smart Program Update

Water-Smart (formally known as the Expanded Assistance Program) provides free analysis of lead drinking water samples and technical assistance to eligible public and private schools and early education and childcare facilities (EECFs) by assisting with sampling, results interpretation, and guidance on remediation actions. The program is funded by a grant from the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust.

Currently, 1,276 schools and EECFs are participating in the program and 1,120 (88%) of participating facilities are within economically disadvantaged communities. To date, 1,168 schools and EECFs have completed testing. Of facilities that have tested and received results, 767 (66%) had one or more lead detections.

Do you know of any schools or childcare facilities that could benefit from the Water-Smart Program? Please identify and encourage schools and childcares within your service area to participate in the program. Eligible facilities may apply for assistance at: Water-Smart Program Website.

Get Ahead with Lead Testing: Join the Water-Smart Pilot Program for Public Water Systems

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is proud to invite all Community Public Water Systems (PWS) to the *Water-Smart Pilot Program for PWS* – a forward-thinking initiative designed to help water systems stay ahead of upcoming federal regulations.

Starting **November 1, 2027**, PWS will be **required to offer** lead testing to all primary schools and childcare facilities under the Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI). Only schools and childcare facilities that were built on or after January 1, 2014-or have had full plumbing replacements since that date-and are not served by lead, galvanized requiring replacement (GRR), or lead status unknown service lines may be excluded from this requirement. Rather than wait, the *Pilot Program* gives PWS a head start—leveraging the well-established **Water-Smart Program**, which has already tested over 1,000 schools and childcare facilities across the Commonwealth.

Through the pilot program, MassDEP and UMass Amherst cover the cost of lead testing and provide all necessary outreach materials, sampling plans, and follow-up support. PWS simply help identify eligible facilities, assist with local outreach and help collect samples. The process is simple, cost-free, and designed to set you up for success when the rule goes into effect.

Participating in the Pilot Program allows PWS to:

- Offer a valuable service to schools and childcare centers now,
- Fulfill future federal requirements early,
- Build community trust, and
- Access expert technical support at no cost.

Don't wait for 2027—Be Proactive, get ahead today. For more information or to join the pilot program visit Water-Smart (Lead in School Drinking Water) Pilot Program for Public Water Suppliers | Mass.gov, or email **Program.Director-DWP@mass.gov** with the subject line: **"Pilot Program for PWS."**

8. PFAS Update

2026 Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (DWSRF) Draft Intended Use Plan (IUP)

On February 20th MassDEP issued the 2026 DWSRF Draft Intended Use Plan listing proposed projects to be offered financial support in the upcoming year. The IUP includes 16 new drinking water construction projects. All 16 of these projects are to address PFAS contamination: some new treatment facilities,

upgrades to existing treatment facilities, and 2 water main extensions to homes with private wells impacted by PFAS.

All new projects receiving financial assistance for 2026 will be eligible for 2% interest rate loans. The Clean Water Trust will no longer be offering 0% interest rate loans for PFAS construction projects. To date, the Trust has committed to financing $731 million in projects with a 0% interest rate under the PFAS loan program and is approaching the limit of what can be afforded using available funding resources.

9. Drinking Water Trivia!

Tickle your brain and test your knowledge on drinking water related information. In each issue, we will ask 1-3 questions and provide the answers somewhere else in the newsletter to encourage your sleuthing skills.

Approximately, how long does it take for plastic bottles to break down in a landfill?

A. 1 year
B. 150 years
C. 450 years
D. 1000 years

Check out the other articles while looking for the answer. If you would like to send in a Trivia question or two, please email the question and answer to program.director-dwp@mass.gov, subject DWP Trivia

10. Training Calendar

When you need training, please look at the MassDEP Training Calendar for Public Water System Operators.

Board of Certification Training Page and List of Approved Courses

You may also want to go to the Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities Operators Training Webpage and view the approved education courses to sit for examination.

Some Newly Added Trainings on the Calendar

EFCN - Finding a Unicorn Session 9: Office Hours: Awards & Procurement
Tuesday, March 24, 2026; 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET; webinar
Bring your questions, compare notes with peers, and receive direct support from the Capacity Collaborative team to help you understand how funds are awarded and discuss how to overcome common challenges in the procurement cycle. Register for the webinar EFCN - Finding a Unicorn Session 9: Office Hours: Awards & Procurement.

Building Drought and Wildfire Resilience for Water Sector Utilities: Technical Assistance and Resources from EPA SWIFT
Wednesday, March 25, 2026; 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET; webinar
SWIFT's experts can provide hands-on technical assistance to help your utility build resilience to drought and wildfire hazards through risk-informed project planning and investment. Learn about the SWIFT technical assistance process, explore online tools for understanding and assessing system risk to these

hazards, and review resources for identifying resilient infrastructure projects. Register for the webinar Building Drought and Wildfire Resilience for Water Sector Utilities: Technical Assistance and Resources from EPA's SWIFT Initiative.

EFCN - Tips for Retaining a Happy, Healthy Water Workforce

Thursday, March 26, 2026; 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ET; webinar

Water and wastewater professionals face significant pressures—long hours, emergency response, regulatory demands, and staffing challenges—that can take a toll on mental health. Smaller utilities often lack formal HR support or employee assistance programs, making mental health awareness and practical tools even more important. This session explores simple, easy-to-implement strategies to support co-workers, reduce stigma, and strengthen workplace culture. Participants will leave with practical steps and accessible mental health resources they can use right away to build a healthier, more resilient workforce. Presenters: Brian Bohnsack, PhD, Program Manager at Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center, and Nancy Spangler, PhD, President at Spangler Associates Inc. Register for the webinar EFCN - Tips for Retaining a Happy, Healthy Water Workforce.

Ask Me Anything! State Revolving Fund (SRF) Technical Assistance & Open Office Hours: How do I prepare for a financial review?

Wednesday, April 1, 2026; 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ET; webinar

Ask Me Anything SRF Office Hours will expand your knowledge and enhance your ability to navigate the SRFs. These sessions are tailored for state agencies, utility operators, and stakeholders who support water infrastructure projects. Each session will feature a specific theme, providing clarity, strategies, and practical insights for preparing and managing an SRF funded project. Participants can attend all sessions or select those that best meet their needs. Register for the webinar Ask Me Anything! State Revolving Fund (SRF) Technical Assistance & Open Office Hours: How do I prepare for a financial review?.

Building Coastal Flooding and Hurricane Resilience for Water Sector Utilities: Technical Assistance and Resources from EPA SWIFT

Wednesday, April 22, 2026; 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET; webinar

Get ahead of hurricane season! Learn how SWIFT's experts can provide customized technical assistance to help your utility build resilience to **coastal flooding and hurricane hazards** through risk-informed project planning and investment. Review this year's hurricane season outlook, learn about the SWIFT technical assistance process, and explore tools that can help your utility better understand and assess system impacts and identify resilient solutions. Register for the webinar Building Coastal Flooding and Hurricane Resilience for Water Sector Utilities: Technical Assistance and Resources from EPA's SWIFT Initiative.

How Water Sector Utilities are Building Resilience to Natural Hazards: Utilities Recount their Engagement with EPA SWIFT Technical Assistance

Wednesday, May 20, 2026; 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET; webinar

SWIFT technical assistance is tailored to meet the needs of each utility request, from improving the understanding of natural hazard impacts to their system to quantifying the potential reductions in risk that specific projects can deliver. Learn how water sector utilities are benefitting from SWIFT technical

assistance. **Hear directly from utility representatives** across the country that have engaged in the process to build system resilience to various natural hazards. Register for the webinar How Water Sector Utilities are Building Resilience to Natural Hazards: Utilities Recount their Engagement with EPA SWIFT Technical Assistance.

Trainings by Organization

- **MassDEP**
  Previous Cybersecurity Trainings now on YouTube:
  - Basic Cybersecurity Measures for Water Utilities
  - Ransomware Experiences, Defense, and Response

- **Environmental Finance Center Network Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **EPA Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **Mass Rural Water Association Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **MWWA Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **NEWWA Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **Water ISAC Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **RCAP Solutions Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **AWWA Trainings, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **New England Section of AWWA, Webinars and In-Person Trainings**

- **SkillWorks**
  - SkillWorks offers Board-approved home-study correspondence courses to satisfy license renewal continuing education requirements. All correspondence courses use paper-based study materials and exams. Course work is submitted by mail. Mailed returns are processed and graded within 24 hours at no extra charge. Courses with optional online exams are processed and graded automatically to provide exam results and a printable Certificate of Completion instantly. View the list of approved courses and purchase a course online at Massachusetts SkillWorks Trainings website.

Training Refresher

If you need a refresher on recently given trainings, you can review several training videos located at The MassDEP Drinking Water Training YouTube Playlist.

11. Cybersecurity, Emergency Preparedness, and You!

PLEASE SHARE THIS CYBERSECURITY INFORATION WITH YOUR SCADA & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFF

For additional information and alerts see Cybersecurity Resource Hub for MA Public Water Systems (PWS). The purpose of this hub is to provide resources for public water systems (PWS) to improve cybersecurity defenses, mitigate cyber-attack risks, and enhance overall resiliency and compliance.

Cybersecurity Biweekly Spotlight

Deep Dive into Iranian Cyber Actor Tactics – What Utilities Need to Know (Source- WaterISAC)

- WaterISAC details the main tactics current and historical research has attributed to Iranian-linked threat actors. These are actors affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iran's primary intelligence agency known as the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). They are advanced persistent threat actors (APTs) and are known to target critical infrastructure, including water and wastewater utilities.
- PWS are encouraged to review the mitigations listed here (TLP:CLEAR) Deep Dive into Iranian Cyber Actor Tactics – What Utilities Need to Know - WaterISAC

Important Reminder - Be Vigilant!!

The Ongoing Geopolitical Tensions with Iran Is Causing a Heightened Threat Environment in the United States

- Critical infrastructure including water and wastewater systems (WWS) continues to be a potential target for malicious actors. During periods of geopolitical tension, the risk of cyber activity against infrastructure sectors often increases.
- In the case of Iran, we have already seen their state-funded group, known as CyberAv3ngers, attacking WWS by compromising default credentials in Unitronics devices.
- While threats connected to Iran remain a big concern, they are not the only risk. Cybercriminal groups and other nation-state actors around the world could take advantage of periods of global instability.
- Also, with the rise of automated software tools (Such as A.I.) your system can be found with very little effort. It is critical to act now by taking advantage of the resources below.
- Strengthening cybersecurity practices can significantly reduce risk. Key steps include using strong passwords, implementing multifactor authentication, limiting OT exposure to the public facing internet, keeping software and firmware updated, replacing all default passwords on OT devices with strong, unique passwords, and monitoring networks for unusual activity.

Cybersecurity Resources:

In light of recent increases in cybersecurity threats, particularly those aimed at WWS, it is critical for all systems in the sector to remain vigilant and proactive in protecting their routine operations.

- Perform a free cybersecurity assessment for your system: MassDEP strongly encourages you to take advantage of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) free cybersecurity assessment program. This great initiative provides a thorough assessment of your system's cybersecurity posture, all virtually for your convenience. It's better the EPA highlights potential attack vectors

before a bad actor takes advantage of them. Apply here today: EPA's Water Sector Cybersecurity Evaluation Program | US EPA

- MassDEP DWP Self-Paced Course on Basic Cybersecurity Measures for Water and Wastewater Systems in Massachusetts (1 TCH). Enroll Here For Free: Basic Cybersecurity Measures for Water and Wastewater Systems in Massachusetts
- Apply Today - MassDEP DWP Public Water Suppliers Cybersecurity Improvements Grant Program. The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, in partnership with the MassDEP DWP, is offering grants funds of up to $50,000, to PWSs that have a cybersecurity risk assessment and use operational technology equipment with an identified cybersecurity risk. Apply here: Public Water Suppliers Cybersecurity Improvements Grant Program | Mass.gov
- Visit the MassDEP Cyber Resource Hub for additional alerts, tools, and guidance.

Grants and Fundings

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund in partnership with MassDEP/DWP, is offering grants funds of up to **$50,000**, to PWSs that have a cybersecurity risk assessment and use operational technology equipment with an identified cybersecurity risk.
Details here: Public Water Suppliers Cybersecurity Improvements Grant Program | Mass.gov.

Important Reminder: Is your PWS scheduled for a sanitary survey in 2026?

If your PWS is scheduled for a sanitary survey in 2026, MassDEP/DWP will inspect your cybersecurity assessment findings and plans during the upcoming sanitary survey cycle. Details here.
Please prepare your PWS for the MassDEP cybersecurity assessment review. Preparation may include:

- Signing up for a FREE USEPA Cybersecurity Assessment EPA's Water Sector Cybersecurity Evaluation Program | US EPA.
- For additional options see MassDEP's Letter on Sanitary Survey Cybersecurity Program/Assessment Report Inspection

12. How To Subscribe to the In The Main Newsletter

Subscribe to the *In The Main* Newsletter here!

MassDEP is sending this important drinking water information to all PWS responsible persons who are listed on the state database. If you are no longer the correct responsible person for the PWS please reply with the correct contact information. MassDEP needs one responsible contact person from each PWS. Operators, consultants, and others who are interested in Drinking Water Program updates are encouraged to request to be subscribed to this email list. To subscribe to the *In The Main Newsletter*, subscribe by completing the quick ITM Newsletter Sign-Up Form. This MassDEP Program Director technical assistance email is funded by the Safe Drinking Water Act Assessment (Section 70) Program. The Assessment is paid by all consumers of public water in Massachusetts and is collected by public water systems. For more information about the Assessment Program, visit to the Safe Drinking Water Act Assessment Advisory Committee ("Section 70" Committee) Homepage.

13. Drinking Water Trivia! Answer

Answer: C

The amount of time it takes for plastic to break down depends on the item itself. For example, a plastic bag can take 20 years while plastic straws can take 200 years. However, they aren't broken down biologically like organics. Instead they are broken into smaller fragments, which can still pollute the environment.