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

In the Main Newsletter – 12/12/2025

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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.

Mirror Lake, Devens, photo by Eric Cheung

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. Preparing for a Sanitary Survey (For TNC Systems)

A sanitary survey is a required onsite inspection MassDEP conducts every 5 years for all Transient Non-Community (TNC) Public Water Systems (PWS). The goal is to confirm your system can provide safe drinking water. The sanitary survey is scheduled and conducted by MassDEP Drinking Water Program regional staff, and preparing in advance is essential for a successful inspection.

What Can a TNC PWS Expect?

MassDEP DWP staff will contact you to schedule the required survey of your water system. You should expect to spend time with a surveyor reviewing your system, walking through components, reviewing system related reports and documentation, and answering any questions the surveyor may have. Depending on the size of your system, the inspection can take anywhere from 1 hour to several hours and could be virtual, in-person, or a combination of both virtual and in-person.

What does MassDEP Review?

At a minimum the survey will address the following eight sanitary survey components:

1. Source Water

- Whether your source is a drilled well, spring, or surface water intake, make sure you know its location and can provide access to it. Open any heavy concrete lids, manhole covers, or hatches before the survey, or have the necessary tools or keys available to open them during the inspection. If your system uses a well pump, be prepared to provide the pump's flow rate. Other key points are:
    - Well cap secure and in good condition
    - Area around the well clean, dry, and free of chemicals or storage
    - No signs of flooding or contamination risks

2. Treatment (If You Have It)

Know the location of all treatment facilities, the treatment processes used, and the contaminants each process addresses. Be familiar with any point-of-use filters or water softeners in use. If the system uses chemical injection (e.g., chlorine disinfection or pH adjustment), know the chemical dosage rates. Keep records of the manufacturer and model numbers for all treatment equipment, including chemical injection pumps and filtration units. Understand how often your filters backwash, the backwash flow

rates, and where the backwash is discharged. Also know the frequency and schedule of routine treatment plant servicing.

3. Finished water storage

Be prepared to provide access to the finished water storage tank. Know the tank's location, capacity, and how water is delivered from the tank to the system. Identify the locations of the tank overflow, vents, manways, and drains. Open any heavy concrete lids, manhole covers, or hatches in advance of the survey, or have the necessary tools or keys available to open them during the survey.

4. Pumps, pump facilities, and controls

Know which pumps are used in your water system and where they are located. Be familiar with their flow rates and how each pump operates. Other key elements to take into consideration are:

- Pump house clean, accessible, and locked
- Any tanks (including pressure tanks) in good condition (no leaks or corrosion)
- Electrical components protected and functioning

5. Distribution System

Before the sanitary survey, make sure you are familiar with all connections served by your system, including buildings, hydrants, and spigots. Know the locations, sizes, and construction materials of your distribution lines. Be able to identify and provide access to your sampling locations and any sites where daily chlorine readings are taken. Other key elements to look for are:

- No cross-connections (e.g., hoses in mop sinks, unprotected sprayers)
- Backflow protection installed where needed
- Plumbing in good repair

6. Monitoring, reporting, and data verification

Keep copies of all laboratory reports and monitoring schedules. Confirm that you are meeting your current monitoring requirements, and make sure all required monthly reports are completed and submitted on time. Some of the sample results to go through during the survey are:

- Total coliform monitoring results
- Nitrate sample results
- Seasonal start-up checklist (if seasonal)

7 & 8. System Management, Operations, and Operator Compliance

Know the status of your Operating License and ensure the water system has a Certified Operator of the appropriate grade. Be familiar with any recent maintenance or system changes and understand the routine and preventive maintenance practices in place. Other elements to pay attention to are:

- Your certified operator must be present during the survey
- Any previous survey issues have been corrected
- **Cybersecurity:** Ensure all system computers and control equipment are secure by using strong passwords, updating software, and limiting access to authorized personnel only.

- **Lead Service Lines:** Confirm that no lead or galvanized-requiring-replacement service lines exist by reviewing system records and verifying service line materials.

Quick Prep Checklist

Before your survey, make sure:

- Pump house and source area are clean and accessible
- Sampling results are on hand
- Pressure system and pump are working normally
- Treatment equipment (if any) is operating
- Chemicals are properly stored
- Basic records or notes are available
- Backflow protection is in place where needed

After the Survey

Following the survey, MassDEP will issue a report to the water system which identifies the findings of the survey and includes a compliance schedule to address any deficiencies identified during the survey. System deficiencies need to be corrected in accordance with a schedule approved by the MassDEP DWP. A well-prepared TNC system makes the survey fast, avoids violations, and ensures your customers receive safe drinking water.

2. Drinking Water Operator License Renewals Due on December 31!

This is a reminder that drinking water operator licenses must be renewed by the end of this month, December 31, 2025!

Under the provisions of 236 CMR 4.07, drinking water operator licenses expire December 31 of every odd-numbered year. Operators seeking to renew their license(s) must submit a license renewal fee and certification that they have completed the required number of training contact hours (TCHs) for the highest-grade license they hold. The Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities (the Board) will be reviewing all license renewal applications.

Information on how to renew an operator license on ePlace can be found on the webpage Renew Your Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities License. Additionally, operators can reference the renewal FAQ page, the License Renewal Guidance for Operators with Multiple Licenses guide, or contact the Board at drinkingwaterboard@mass.gov with any questions.

Resources for Finding Board-Approved Trainings

The Information on Required Training for License Renewal webpage includes information about the number of required TCHs for each license grade and other information about receiving and documenting TCHs. **The Board reminds operators that the trainings they take for license renewal must be approved by the Board for TCH credit.** Operators can review the list of approved TCH trainings on the webpage Training contact hours.

Additionally, operators can use the following resources to find Board-approved trainings.

- Organizations with blanket approval for trainings:
  - MA Water Works Association
  - MA Rural Water Association
  - New England Water Works Association
  - MA Water Resources Authority (note: trainings for MWRA employees only)
  - Western MA Waterworks Association
  - Plymouth County Water Works Association
- MassDEP/DWP has partnered with the University of Illinois to offer free online trainings for MA water operators on the WaterOperator.Org platform:
  - Source Water Protection in Massachusetts – 0.5 TCHs
  - Basic Cybersecurity Measures for Water and Wastewater Systems in Massachusetts – 1.0 TCH

3. Getting Ready for EPA Consumer Confidence Report Rule Revisions

Attention Community (COM) Public Water Suppliers:

On 12/10/25, the MassDEP Drinking Water Program sent a direct email to all Community (COM) Public Water Suppliers to encourage and support them as they get ready for the upcoming changes of the EPA revised Consumer Confidence Report regulations coming into effect on 1/1/2027. The direct email provided further details on the EPA revised Consumer Confidence Report regulations as well as newly created reporting requirements and report components, a copy is available at Communication to Public Water Suppliers - Emails and Direct Mail. We encourage you to start preparing for these changes and to reach out to DWP for any technical assistance your PWS needs to expedite the intended public health protection of these CCR revisions.

At DWP, we are currently preparing for this revision to come into effect in 2027. Be on the lookout for informational updates via outreach as well as updates made to our many helpful CCR resources, forms, and tools:

- Updates on the rule revision via the DWP *In the Main* newsletter and other direct emailed outreach efforts.
- Updates to the MassDEP CCR webpage, Appendix M, the newly created Language Access Plan (LAP) template, and a Frequently Asked Questions document:
  - ***Appendix M*** *is a comprehensive guide that walks users through preparing and submitting a CCR -* *Preparing Your Drinking Water Consumer Confidence Report.*
  - *The* ***Language Access Plan (LAP)*** *is a new requirement and component of CCRs for COM PWSs serving over 100,000 consumers -* *Consumer Confidence Reports | Mass.gov*

DWP is available to provide technical assistance and answer questions regarding this regulation revision and is also planning a Fall 2026 training webinar for PWS.

The federal notice for the EPA final revisions published on May 24th, 2024, can be found at Federal Register - National Primary Drinking Water Regulations: Consumer Confidence Reports

An EPA factsheet comparing the current and revised rule is also available on the EPA website.

If you have any questions about the CCR rule revision, please contact program.director-dwp@mass.gov.

4. New Certified Operator Compliance Notice (COCN) Forms

MassDEP/DWP recently made updates to the Certified Operator Compliance Notice (COCN) forms.

The COCN form is for PWS who use contract operations to meet their requirement to have a certified operator. The COCN form identifies the Primary Operator (and Secondary Operator, if required) and, in combination with the Typical Duties and Responsibilities (COD) form, identifies the activities of the PWS that fall under the jurisdiction of the PWS Owner, Operator, or both.

There are now two COCN forms that PWS may be directed to use by their MassDEP regional office:

1. The COCN-A form is for the initial agreement between a PWS Owner and a Contract Operator or Contract Operator Firm and for subsequent updates. This form requires signatures from both the Owner and the Operator to certify that all parties are aware of their duties and responsibilities.
2. The COCN-B form can be used for subsequent updates if the only change to the agreement between the Owner and the Operator is the name of the Primary or Secondary Operator(s). If the duties and responsibilities of the operator(s) changes, then the COCN-B form cannot be used, and the COCN-A form must be submitted to the MassDEP regional office. The COCN-B form only requires a signature from the Operator certifying changes to the operator's name(s); however, a copy of the approved COCN-B form will be sent to the owner, so they are aware of the change in operator(s). Contract Operators or Contract Operator Firms wishing to use the COCN-B form should confirm with their MassDEP regional office if they can use this form.

The new COCN forms can be downloaded on the webpage Certified Operator Forms. If you have any questions, please contact the Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov, Subject: COCN Forms.

5. Drinking Water Operator Exam – Updates for 2026

Starting January 1, 2026, the standardized drinking water operator exams used in Massachusetts will be updated with the testing organization's recent exam updates.

Drinking Water Operators in Massachusetts are required to pass an exam prior to applying for and receiving a drinking water operator license. In Massachusetts, the exams are "standardized" exams developed by the testing organization Water Professionals International (WPI) (formerly Association of Boards of Certification (ABC)). These "standardized" exams are used in many states, including all six New England states.

In 2025, WPI made updates to their standardized exams to more accurately reflect the knowledge needed by today's drinking water operators and to implement "scaled scoring" to account for each individual exam's difficulty. Information about "scaled scoring" can be reviewed on WPI's website on the page "Scaled Scoring: An Overview". The Massachusetts Board of Certification of Operators of Drinking Water Supply Facilities (the Board) approved the adoption of the 2025 updated standardized exams, and the change in exam will be implemented beginning January 1, 2026.

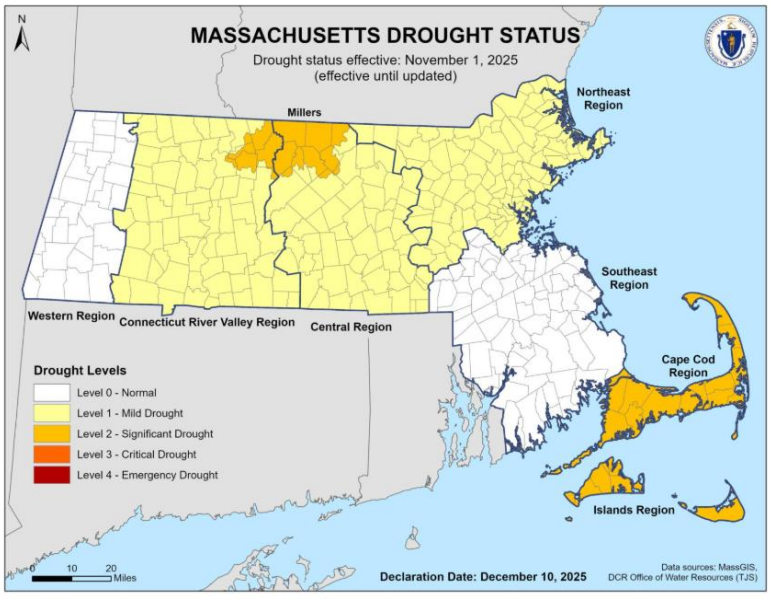
The new 2025 Need-to-Know Criteria for the updated exams can be downloaded from WPI's website. WPI's website also includes recommended resources for studying for the drinking water operator exams.

Important: Operators taking drinking water exams do not need to do anything differently in terms of registering and taking their exam. Operators who took exams prior to January 1, 2026 and then take an exam after this date may see minor changes to the types of questions on their exams and may see their exam result scorecard in a new format. Operators do not need to do anything differently to prepare for their exam; they should continue to study available materials and take any required pre-requisite courses prior to taking their exam.

If you have any questions about the drinking water operator exam updates, please contact the Drinking Water Board at DrinkingWaterBoard@mass.gov or contact the Drinking Water Program at program.director-dwp@mass.gov, Subject: DW Operator Exams.

6. Drought Conditions Return to Normal in Western Region

On December 10, 2025, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) declared the Western Region has returned to Normal Conditions. The drought conditions in the rest of the state have remained unchanged.



Level 1 ("Mild Drought") and Level 2 ("Significant Drought") 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.

7. LCR, LCRR, and LCRI Updates

This Month's Lead Funding News

This month (December 2025), EPA announced $3 billion in new funding for states to reduce lead in drinking water. Check out the EPA press release here.

In addition, EPA also launched a user-friendly new Inventory Dashboard highlighting information from lead service line inventories provided by states.

For the 7th DWINSA allocation, MassDEP DWP noted that EPA is using the MassDEP LCRR submitted Service Line Inventory (SLI) data for the allotments to estimate possible Galvanized Requiring Replacement (GRR) and lead service lines (LSL).

Please note that EPA's numbers are usually slightly different from the DWP because we report to them quarterly, while our inventory data is updated continuously—often due to verification of unknowns or completed LSL/GRR replacements. The difference is generally minimal. The next report is due at the end of this month.

- For this DWINSA allocation, Massachusetts has an estimated 51,506 GRRs and LSLs out of the estimated 3,956,383 in the country which is 1.3%. For more information see the 2025 Updated Service Line Projections.
    - In the previous 2024 DWINSA allocation, Massachusetts had a projected 226,242 GRRs and LSLs. The submitted SLIs from water systems reduced this number to the more accurate 51,506 projected lead service lines.
- While Massachusetts has an estimated 1.3% of all LSLs, with SRF allocations, every state is guaranteed at least 1% of the federal grant. Due to this, Massachusetts is only receiving 1.19% of the allotted federal DWINSA funds, compared to 1.75% in FY 2024.

- Other states with less than 1% of the total LSLs in the country will receive a minimum of 1% of the federal funding, which can be redistributed later should all funding not be used.
- This resulted in a 16 million decrease in funding for Massachusetts.

DWINSA Funding 2024 Vs 2025

FY 2024 Grant	FY 2025 Grant	FY 2024 %	FY 2025 %
$50,095,000	$34,037,000	1.75%	1.19%

Findings from the Overall Ranking of Other States in FY 2024 and FY 2025 DWINSA Allotments

Note: Of the top 20 states/territories receiving the most allotments, 10 of those 20 are receiving an increased amount of funding compared to FY 2024. 5 have them have almost doubled their percent received (from 1% to 2-3%).

Largest Noticeable Changes/Increases in Allotments:

Texas – Texas raised 27 spots in the ranking, going from 36th to 9th most funded, and going from an allotment of 1.00% (28,650,000) to 2.72% (77,961,000). This is due to their estimated GRR service lines, which went from a total of 20,355 to 137,872, increasing over 6 fold.

Michigan – Michigan raised 9 spots in the ranking (from 13th to 4th), they over doubled their allotment from $61,916,000 to $149,392,000 (2.16% to 5.21%).

Indiana – Indiana moved 6 spots, which moved them from the 12th most funded state to 6th most funded state, with a change in allotment funds from $65,818,000 to 133,960,000 (2.30% to 4.68%).

Remember to send out your 2025 Service Line Inventory (SLI) Consumer Notices this year!

This is a reminder for PWS, if your PWS has lead, GRR, and/or unknown service lines in your SLI, you must send out SLI CNs **annually**. This is a new recurring requirement under the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR).

2025 SLI CNs must be distributed by December 31, 2025! Templates are available on the **Lead and Copper Forms and Templates webpage,** which were updated June 2025.

If your system has identified any unknowns, or replaced any lead/GRR service lines, your PWS is encouraged to submit an updated SLI a few days before distributing your consumer notices, so when your system certified their distribution next year, MassDEP has an accurate, updated SLI to compare your certification form to. This limits the back and forth required to review your certification form and expedites your form approval.

8. Thank you for Participating in the 2025 Mercury Survey!

The 2025 Mercury Questionnaire was due December 1, 2025, 416 PWS submitted the survey by the deadline! Thank you all for participating (26.28% of all PWS). Of the 416 systems, 179 (43%) are Community (COM) PWS, 189 (45%) are Transient Non-Community (TNC) PWS, and 48 (12%) are Non-Transient Non-Community (NTNC) PWS. The full results report, with results from the 2007, 2013, 2019,

and 2025 Mercury Survey is available for review and download (Word) here: 2007-2025 Mercury Questionnaire Results. A report summary of the 2025 Mercury Survey is also available on the Drinking Water Contaminants Information webpage here: Mercury Questionnaire Results Summary (2007-2025).

9. 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, 1,214 schools and EECFs are participating in the program and 1,070 (88%) of participating facilities are within economically disadvantaged communities. To date, 1,111 schools and EECFs have completed testing. Of facilities that have tested and received results, 736 (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: https://tinyurl.com/Water-SmartProgram.

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**, all PWS will be **required to offer** lead testing to schools and childcare facilities that were built or have not had plumbing replacements since 2014 under the federal Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI). 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. To join the pilot program or receive more information, email **Program.Director-DWP@mass.gov** with the subject line: **"Pilot Program for PWS."**

10. PFAS Update

Initial Monitoring under the federal regulations

The Drinking Water Program has completed its review of our 676 non-consecutive Community and Non-Transient Non-Community PWS to confirm that they have completed the required initial monitoring under the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations. Even though the U.S. EPA plans to modify the regulations, they have indicated that they do not intend to revise the April 2027 initial monitoring deadline. The regulations allow states to accept previously acquired data from PWS to meet the initial sampling requirements if the testing results meet the data quality and timing requirements. 589 (87% of required PWS) have been sent letters confirming that they have met the initial monitoring requirements; 87 (13%) other PWS have had PFAS sampling added to their 2026 Sampling Schedules.

11. 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.

Which of the following is a cold weather myth?

A. Hot water warms you faster
B. Drinking alcohol doesn't warm you up
C. Cold weather affects how thirsty you feel
D. You lose water more in cold, dry air

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.

12. 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

Ask Me Anything! State Revolving Fund (SRF) Technical Assistance & Open Office Hours: Case Study: Lead Service Lines- guest: Jean Devlin

Monday, December 15, 2025; 2:00 – 4:00pm; 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 Ask Me Anything! State Revolving Fund (SRF) Technical Assistance & Open Office Hours: Case Study: Lead Service Lines- guest: Jean Devlin

Bridging the Gap: Budget and Resilience

Tuesday, December 16, 2025; 1:00 – 2:00pm; webinar

Aging infrastructure and limited financing required to replace it are the top two issues facing the water sector, according to AWWA's 2025 survey of water professionals. Workforce limitations, service affordability, and non-revenue water losses further compound the challenge of maintaining a reliable and secure water supply. As infrastructure ages, utilities typically respond in one of three ways: 1. Do nothing, leading to costly emergency repairs. 2. Repair issues as they are discovered, leading to piecemeal, part-by-part fixes. 3. Undertake full replacement. While many solutions for repairing, monitoring, and modeling water networks exist, most require high upfront investment, creating a barrier for many utilities—particularly smaller ones—to adopt new smart water technologies. Register for Bridging the Gap: Budget and Resilience

Finding a Unicorn! Small Wastewater System Funding Series: Building Compelling Award Applications (Part 1)

Tuesday, December 16, 2025; 1:00 – 2:00pm; webinar

This webinar will focus on federal award requirements and how to prepare your organization to apply and manage a public grant. We will address typical grant compliance, organizational readiness, and components for a successful award application. Register for Finding a Unicorn! Small Wastewater System Funding Series: Building Compelling Award Applications (Part 1)

Finding a Unicorn! Small Wastewater System Funding Series: Building Compelling Award Applications (Part 2)

Thursday, December 18, 2025; 1:00 – 2:00pm; webinar

All strong funding applications start with a thorough understanding of local needs, supported by quantitative and qualitative data. This webinar will cover the process of developing a compelling application that clearly establishes needs, priorities, and goals for your project funding application. Register for Finding a Unicorn! Small Wastewater System Funding Series: Building Compelling Award Applications (Part 2)

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**

- **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.

13. 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

EPA Alert: PRC State-Sponsored Actors Use BRICKSTORM Malware for Long-Term Persistence on Victim Systems

The U.S. EPA issued an alert to inform water and wastewater system owners and operators about recent cyber-threat activity involving state-sponsored actors from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

- PRC threat actors are deploying BRICKSTORM malware to maintain long-term persistence on victims' systems. BRICKSTORM is a sophisticated backdoor capable of exploiting and operating VMware Sphere systems as well as Windows systems, enabling threat actors to sustain stealthy access and providing capabilities for initiation, persistence, and secure command-and-control operations.
- BRICKSTORM can conceal its malicious communications and facilitate lateral movement from IT to OT networks by creating hidden, encrypted pathways within the victims' networks, making it difficult to detect.
- Additionally, it utilizes a self-monitoring function that automatically reinstalls or restarts the malware if disrupted with a goal of continued operation. Mitigations All drinking water and wastewater systems operating VMware vSphere and Windows environments are strongly encouraged to implement the following mitigations immediately to enhance resilience against the BRICKSTORM malware. Systems that outsource technology support should consult with their service providers for assistance with these steps:
- Upgrade VMware vSphere servers to the latest version.
- Take inventory of all network edge devices and monitor for any suspicious network connectivity originating from these devices.
- Ensure proper network segmentation restricts network traffic from the DMZ to the internal network.
- Disable Remote Desktop Protocol and Server Message Block from the DMZ to the internal network.
- Apply the principle of least privilege and restrict service accounts to only needed permissions.
- Increase monitoring for service accounts, which are highly privileged and have a predictable pattern of behavior.
- Block unauthorized DNS-over-HTTPS (DoH) providers and external DoH network traffic to reduce unmonitored communications.
- Scan for BRICKSTORM using CISA-created YARA and Sigma rules found here: CISA BRICKSTORM YARA Rules.
- CISA requests that organizations report BRICKSTORM, similar malware, or potentially related activity to CISA's 24/7 Operations Center (contact@cisa.dhs.gov), 1-844-Say-CISA (1-844-729-2472), or CISA's Incident Reporting System. Please identify the activity that is related to BRICKSTORM, and CISA will reach out with the next steps.
- Conclusion: For additional details, please refer to CISA alert AR25-338A: BRICKSTORM Backdoor. If you have questions about any of the information in this alert, including assistance with the mitigation steps, please submit a request to EPA's Cybersecurity Technical Assistance Program for the Water Sector.

CISA Advisory - Pro-Russia Hacktivists Conduct Opportunistic Attacks Against US and Global Critical Infrastructure

- CISA, along with the FBI, NSA, and several international cybersecurity partners, has issued a new advisory (AA25-343A) warning about a rise in opportunistic cyberattacks against U.S. and global critical infrastructure.
- The authoring organizations assess pro-Russia hacktivist groups are conducting less sophisticated, lower-impact attacks against critical infrastructure entities, compared to advanced persistent threat (APT) groups.
- These attacks use minimally secured, internet-facing virtual network computing (VNC) connections to infiltrate (or gain access to) OT control devices within critical infrastructure systems.
- Pro-Russia hacktivist groups—Cyber Army of Russia Reborn (CARR), Z-Pentest, NoName057(16), Sector16, and affiliated groups are capitalizing on the widespread prevalence of accessible VNC devices to execute attacks against critical infrastructure entities, resulting in varying degrees of impact, including physical damage. Targeted sectors include Water and Wastewater Systems, Food and Agriculture, and Energy.
- The authoring organizations encourage critical infrastructure organizations to implement the recommendations in the Mitigations section of this advisory to reduce the likelihood and impact of pro-Russia hacktivist-related incidents. For additional information on Russian state-sponsored malicious cyber activity, see CISA's Russia Threat Overview and Advisories webpage.

Is your PWS scheduled for a sanitary survey in 2025/2026?

If your PWS is scheduled for a sanitary survey in 2025/2026, MassDEP/DWP will inspect your cybersecurity assessment findings and plans during the upcoming sanitary survey cycle.
Details here.

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.

14. Supply Chain Reminders

PWSs are reminded to 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.
Tools and Resources

- 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.

15. How To Subscribe to the In The Main Newsletter

To subscribe to the *In The Main Newsletter*, send a blank email to join-dep-dwp-subscribers@listserv.state.ma.us.

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*, send a blank email to join-dep-dwp-subscribers@listserv.state.ma.us. 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.

16. Drinking Water Trivia! Answer

Answer: A

Drinking hot water makes you feel warmer but doesn't affect your internal body temperature. Staying hydrated maximizes internal heat production, and cold water is easier to drink than hot water.

Your body dehydrates more easily during the winter due to breathing dry air and sweat evaporating quickly. The cold weather constricts your blood vessels to preserve heat, but it suppresses your thirst response. Alcohol only thins your blood vessel, making you feel warmer but not affecting your body temperature.

17. Fifth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR5) - Lithium

Public Water Systems (PWS) with Lithium Detections > 10ppb

MassDEP's Drinking Water Program (DWP) has reviewed the UCMR5 results and identified PWSs with lithium detects over EPA's Health Reference Level (HRL) of 10ppb. A letter has been sent to those PWSs to provide recommendations on how to address those lithium detections, and to request specific actions that will support DWP's technical assistance team. DWP recommends those PWSs confirm their UCMR5 lithium levels by conducting two additional quarterly samples to establish an annual baseline of results and is requesting that those PWSs complete a survey by 12/30/2025.