



Drinking Water: What You Should Know

The Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations apply to all public water systems. The primary purpose of these regulations is to ensure that the public is provided with water that is safe to drink. The quality of the water must be maintained from the source to the consumer.

Preventing Contamination

The delivery of high quality drinking water starts with a protected source - the public well, reservoir, or river intake. MassDEP provides each public water system with a Source Water Assessment and Protection (SWAP) report that includes recommendations as to how a community can reduce the risk of contamination. As a senior official of your community, you should request a copy of this report and if appropriate, request a briefing by the manager of your public water system. Although the Water Department is responsible for source protection, other municipal departments can provide significant support. Planning Boards issue permits for land use development. Fire Departments respond to spills of hazardous materials. Boards of Health regulate septic systems and Boards of Selectmen recommend budget expenditures at town meetings.

Maintaining Healthy Drinking Water

The Water Department tests drinking water on a regular basis for over 100 possible contaminants at various locations in the system, including customers' homes. Communities must send these test results to MassDEP and they become public records. The processes used to treat drinking water vary and depend on the compounds that need to be removed. The more compounds that need to be removed (whether naturally occurring or man-made), the more complex the treatment system required. The Water Department must use licensed operators to run the treatment plant. The number of operators and the skills they must have depends on the size of the system and the types of treatment.

The Water Department delivers drinking water to your community using a network of pump stations, storage tanks and underground pipes. Regular maintenance and replacement of these assets by licensed operators ensures that the system remains reliable and maintains high-quality water all the way to the end customer.

Inspections

MassDEP regularly inspects municipal water systems and provides a comprehensive written report to the Water Department. Municipal officials should discuss these reports with the water system operators and familiarize themselves with any actions recommended or required to improve system reliability.

Environmental Stewardship Tips:

1. Prohibit the storage of materials used or collected by the Department of Public Works near drinking water supplies.
2. Use local land use controls to protect drinking water sources.
3. Encourage Low Impact Development techniques to protect drinking water by reducing site impacts, infiltrating more stormwater runoff into the subsurface, and providing more recharge to local groundwaters.
4. Develop comprehensive resource protection and water conservation plans, and foster good communication among municipal boards to promote long-term protection of drinking water quality and quantity

Additional Information

Visit the MassDEP drinking water web site:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/drinking/>

Or use this friendly link to find out who to call in your town:

<http://mass.gov/dep/muni-call>