Fact Sheet

Preparing for the Groundwater Rule

Drinking Water Bureau

The Groundwater Rule (GWR) was finalized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in October 2006 and goes into effect on December 1, 2009. The GWR helps to protect people from groundwater that may be at risk of viral and bacterial contamination. The GWR applies to all public water systems that use groundwater as a drinking water source.

The New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau (NMED DWB) has evaluated the impacts of the federal rule on public water systems, local health jurisdictions, and other impacted stakeholders. Based upon this evaluation, NMED has determined that public water system compliance requirements will be affected, including sanitary surveys, source monitoring, corrective actions, treatment, and public notification.

There are several things you can do to prepare for the GWR before its December 1, 2009, compliance date.

Sanitary Surveys:

• ***Correct deficiencies noted in the last sanitary survey.*** Deficiencies may include an inadequately sealed well or storage tank, unprotected cross-connections, or similar public health risks. Refer to your most recent sanitary survey report to understand any deficiencies specific to your water system. (If you need a copy of your report, please contact your local NMED DWB Water System Specialist). By correcting all deficiencies before your next sanitary survey, you will be better positioned to comply with the GWR. The GWR requires all public water systems with significant deficiencies identified during a sanitary survey to be corrected within 120 days of notification by the NMED DWB, unless the public water system has an NMED DWB approved corrective action plan in place.

Source Monitoring:

• ***Install a sample tap at each wellhead,*** if one isn't already there. The GWR requires an E. coli sample to be collected from the source when a total coliform distribution system sample tests positive for total coliform. This GWR "triggered" source sample must be collected within 24 hours of receiving a positive total coliform distribution system sample, and must be analyzed for the fecal indicator E. coli. If a sample isn't collected from the source within 24 hours, the system will receive a monitoring violation. Also, the source will not have been sampled when the risk to public health is high, and your customers may unknowingly be exposed to harmful bacteria and viruses. Each individual well must have a tap located prior to any treatment for collecting a sample at the wellhead.

• ***Know specifically where each well's water goes in your distribution system.*** You may have wells that serve distinct pressure zones. If a positive coliform sample occurs in a particular pressure zone, it may be possible to collect source samples from only those wells serving that pressure zone. You may not be required to collect an E. coli sample from every well, thereby saving money, time and effort. To sample from only impacted pressure zones, the water system must have an approved representative monitoring plan in place prior to the positive total coliform sampling event. Please contact Mike Huber, Compliance Operations Manager, at (505) 476-8638 for guidance on creating a representative monitoring plan.

Corrective Actions:

• Update your Emergency Response Plan so you are ready to provide alternate water, if needed. If a significant deficiency is discovered during a sanitary survey, or if you have a confirmed E. coli positive sample from your source water, corrective action will be required. Depending on the deficiency, or the extent of fecal-related contamination, you may not be able to provide water from your contaminated sources. An alternate water source may temporarily be needed. Having an up-to-date emergency response plan will prevent you from scrambling for information and assistance, and your customers will not be without water any longer than necessary.

Treatment:

• If you currently disinfect groundwater from a well, contact the NMED DWB Engineering Team at (505) 476-8631. The NMED DWB Engineering Team will confirm water system information to identify those water systems that currently achieve 4-log (99.99%) virus inactivation or removal. Disinfection does not automatically guarantee that a water system is achieving 4-log treatment, so your water system must apply to the NMED DWB to be certified as providing 4-log treatment. Application materials will be available on NMED DWB's website. Systems that currently treat to this level and are certified by the NMED DWB will not be required to collect "triggered" source samples, but will instead be required to meet treatment technique monitoring requirements.

For More Information:

If you have questions about the Groundwater Rule, please contact the NMED DWB Compliance Operations Manager, Mike Huber, at mike.huber@state.nm.us or by telephone at (505) 476-8638.

NMED
New Mexico Environment Department