

SAFE DRINKING WATER ACT (SDWA): EJ Hooks Fact Sheet

Summary of Law

- regulates *public water systems* by treating for contaminants, monitoring to ensure that health-based standards are met, making sure water is treated by qualified operators, and maintaining the infrastructure, especially of distribution pipes that carry water from the treatment plant to customers
- assesses and protects drinking water sources
- protects wellhead and collection systems
- makes information available to the public on the quality of their drinking water

Environmental Justice “Hooks”

The Safe Drinking Water Act provides important opportunities to address the safety of public drinking water and to help prevent contamination of water sources. Categories and examples of SDWA provisions that can be used by community residents include:

Consumer Confidence Reports (CCR): These reports are required by the SDWA as a means to inform consumers about the water they receive from public water supply systems. A CCR summarizes information regarding sources used (i.e., rivers, lakes, reservoirs, or aquifers), any detected contaminants, compliance, and educational information. These reports are due to customers by July 1st of each year. See <http://water.epa.gov/drink/local>

Source Water Assessments: A *source water assessment* (i.e. study and report) seeks to protect drinking water at the source. Source water is untreated water that comes from streams, rivers, lakes or underground aquifers that is intended for human consumption. The SDWA requires that states develop EPA-approved programs to assess all source waters in the state for every public water system. This assessment provides information such as where drinking water comes from, potential sources of contamination, the land area providing water to each public water system, and how susceptible the public water supply is to potential contamination. These assessments are available to the public, and can be obtained from the state or public water system.

Wellhead Protection (WHP): A wellhead is the area surrounding a well from which the well’s ground water is drawn. The SDWA requires states to prepare a WHP plan. Program activities to be included are delineation, contaminant source inventory, contingency planning, and source management. All states have EPA-approved state WHP Plans. Methods to implement the plan include: management plans, education, technical assistance, and mandatory requirements for wellhead protection at the local level.

Public Notification: This tool helps ensure that consumers know if there is a problem with their drinking water. Public water systems must notify their customers when they violate EPA or state drinking water standards or otherwise provide drinking water that may pose a risk to consumer health. Information includes a description of the violation, including the potential health effects, the population at risk, and, if alternate water supplies must be used, what the water system is doing to correct the problem as well as actions the consumer can take. The time a water supplier has to notify the public depends on the situation’s severity, and ranges from one day to one year.