

## Developing Strategies For Drinking Water Protection

Many<sup>1</sup> public water systems in Oregon will receive an Updated Source Water Assessment (USWA) developed by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) drinking water protection team by 2017. USWAs provide the water systems and communities more detailed information on the watershed or recharge area that supplies their well, spring or intake (the “drinking water source area”). Public water systems and local communities can use the information in the assessments to voluntarily develop and implement drinking water protection strategies.

Requirements for water quality monitoring of public water systems in Oregon provide some degree of assurance of safe drinking water; however, all systems are vulnerable to potential contamination. **One of the best ways to ensure safe drinking water and minimize future treatment costs is to develop local strategies designed to protect against potential contamination.** Not only will this add a margin of safety; it will also raise local community awareness of drinking water contamination risks and provide information about how communities and local landowners can help protect their drinking water sources.

### Using Place-Based Planning to Develop Protection Strategies

The drinking water source area for most communities lies partially, if not entirely, outside of their jurisdiction and may include several different governing agencies as well as a diverse mix of landowners, businesses and residents. When developing protection strategies, DEQ and OHA highly recommend that the water system and community involve potentially affected

stakeholders early in the process to foster stakeholder awareness and trust in the resulting strategies.

*Oregon adopted an “Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs)” in 2012 that provides recommendations for how to do a place-based and integrated approach to water resources planning.* This approach helps communities achieve the level of coordination and collaboration to successfully address local water quality and water quantity challenges, such as developing and implementing strategies to protect their drinking water sources. The IWRs Place-Based Planning guidelines describe elements to consider for building a collaborative process, characterizing water-related issues, quantifying existing and future water needs, developing a suite of solutions, and adopting and implementing the plan. More information about the process can be found in this Water Resources Department document: [http://www.oregon.gov/owrd/LAW/docs/IWRS/2015\\_February\\_Draft\\_Place\\_Based\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/owrd/LAW/docs/IWRS/2015_February_Draft_Place_Based_Guidelines.pdf)

### Strategies to Achieve Risk Reduction

The primary goal of the drinking water protection strategies should be to reduce or minimize the risks of pollution in the source water. It is highly improbable that one can *eliminate* risks in any area, but by applying one or more protection strategies, a community will be able to reduce the likelihood of pollutants affecting the water supply in the future. Potential strategies include both general management practices such as conservation or efficiency measures that will apply to the entire drinking water protection area and management practices that can be applied most appropriately by land-use category (commercial/industrial,

<sup>1</sup> All community water systems using surface water will receive a USWA. Because of the number of water systems using groundwater in Oregon, the Oregon Health Authority has prioritized completing assessments for new

Community and Non-Transient Non-Community water systems and systems that have added a new water source since their original source water assessment was completed.



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### Water Quality - Drinking Water Protection

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agricultural/rural, forestry, residential/municipal, and miscellaneous). The following list provides some of the most

common management options as an example to public water suppliers and communities:

<b>Example Strategies for Drinking Water Protection</b>	
<b>Non-Regulatory Options</b>	
<b>Notify and Educate the Public:</b>	Contact property owners within the protection area so they are aware of the need for protection measures. Let them know this is voluntary. Focus educational efforts on basic information about the source water and the relationship between surface activities and the water quality; familiarity with the location of the protected area; basic information on sources of contamination; and effective strategies for safe management of all potential contaminants. Public education/notification can be accomplished using local news outlets, letters to residents, letters to land owners/operators, and bill stuffers/customer mailings. Information signs could be placed adjacent to roadways entering the protection area. Include on the sign the name of the water system/jurisdiction and a phone number where callers can obtain more information or report releases.
<b>Use Technical Assistance Resources:</b>	Work with local or state providers of technical assistance (e.g., DEQ's regional offices, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, OSU Extension) to encourage the use of best management practices for pollution prevention and waste reduction. Apply for grants or funding to provide financial incentives such as pollution prevention tax credits, low-interest loans or direct subsidies/cost sharing. Provide recognition for environmental friendly businesses and operations (e.g., green awards, plaques/door signs).
<b>Sponsor Hazardous Waste/Unused Chemical Collection:</b>	Establishing a permanent location or holding one-day events to collect hazardous wastes from community residents (including households and small businesses) is an effective way to reduce risks posed by storing hazardous wastes or other chemicals within the protection area. Hold an amnesty (free-disposal) event for unused business or agricultural chemicals stored in the protection area. Set up a local materials exchange program (or publicize existing programs).
<b>Develop Spill Response Plans:</b>	Encourage and assist your local fire department and transportation department with spill response planning. Jurisdictions within protection areas could develop specific spill response procedures to allow quicker response and notifications should a hazardous material spill or release occur. These can be integrated into your county's Emergency Management Plan. Contact the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for state highways.
<b>Acquire Land or Rights to Development:</b>	Community ownership of as much as possible of the critical land areas within the protection area and managed for water quality protection provides some of the best assurance of long-term protection of the public water supply. Protection could be provided by ownership accomplished through methods such as capital or bond fund programs, or through easements and deed restrictions. Private non-profit land conservation organizations or local land trusts in your area can assist you in acquiring land within your protection area by conveyance to a trust, seeking donations, or direct land purchases for conservation.
<b>Local Regulatory Options</b>	
<b>Existing Regulations and Permits:</b>	Take advantage of opportunities to provide public comment and input when existing regulatory programs are reviewing permits or programs which affect the siting, design, construction, operation or closure of facilities within your protection area. Ensure you are included on regulatory agency contact lists so that you receive announcements for public involvement opportunities. Consider participating in advisory group meetings for specific topics of interest. Ensure that the regulatory programs are aware of your protection area and request that compliance inspections or technical assistance is prioritized in critical areas.
<b>Land Use Controls (Zoning/Health Ordinances):</b>	There are many different types of zoning tools. Your community can identify the protection area with an overlay map and enact specific requirements for land uses and development within these boundaries in order to protect public health. Ordinances applying to sites that pose a risk to water quality within the overlay area may include prohibition of various land uses (such as landfills or underground fuel storage tanks); subdivision controls (such as limiting density or requiring larger lot sizes); special permitting or siting requirements (i.e. placing limitations on the use of toxic and hazardous materials, pesticides, salts); and performance standards (i.e. requiring secondary containment for petroleum or chemical storage over a certain volume).

## **How do communities use the Updated Source Water Assessments?**

The Updated Source Water Assessment (USWA) provides the information for developing local protection strategies. The USWAs include details characterizing the source area and potential source water risks. It also provides key information that will allow the community to focus limited resources on higher-risk areas within the watershed or recharge zones for wells. The USWA information should be supplemented with local knowledge of the water system and community. The water system and community can refine the delineation of sensitive areas and identification of potential contamination sources through further research, local input and coordination with state agencies.

The USWA source area characterization should be reviewed to clarify the presence, location, operational practices, and actual risks of the identified facilities and land-use activities. Additional potential contaminant sources or sensitive areas may also be added based on local knowledge or additional research. Potential sources with low or no risk (such as landowners who have already incorporated best management practices into their operations to protect your source of drinking water) can be screened out or selected for low priority outreach or technical assistance. Local and state resources can then be directed to the highest priority potential problems in the drinking water source area.

Another way to use the information in the USWA is in developing the water system's contingency plan. Contingency planning focuses on potential threats to the drinking water supply (such as mechanical problems, chemical detections in the source water, chemical spills in the source area, or natural disasters) and the development of procedures to be followed should these events occur. Guidance for preparing a contingency plan and examples are available from OHA. Many contingency plan elements may have already been completed by public water systems as

part of their required Emergency Response Plan. Additional elements can be added as drinking water source protection strategies are developed.

Public water systems may also find it necessary, as a result of either existing or projected increased demand, to explore the development of additional sources for drinking water. Drinking water source protection provides a mechanism that can be used to help select the best site and identify areas that should be protected now so they will provide quality drinking water in the future. Additionally, development of a new groundwater source in the vicinity of existing sources may modify the movement of groundwater in the subsurface, perhaps changing the shape and orientation of existing drinking water source areas. Evaluation of the significance of those changes should be addressed in the protection planning process to ensure that the management strategy in place will continue to protect the community's drinking water supply.

## **Need assistance?**

Drinking water source protection is already at work in Oregon. A number of Oregon communities are currently developing and implementing strategies to protect their drinking water source areas. Successful drinking water protection plans developed in Oregon are available to communities as templates or examples. Staff members at OHA and DEQ are available to provide assistance, and extensive written materials are available to local community groups or consultants to assist in developing drinking water protection plans or strategies.

Detailed information about developing drinking water source protection strategies can be found on DEQ's Drinking Water Protection Program website. The website also includes Updated Source Water Assessment methods and results, Resource Guides for both [surface water](#) and [groundwater](#), sample Drinking Water Protection Plans,

information for schools, and links to many other useful sites: <http://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/programs/Pages/DWP.aspx>

The OHA – Drinking Water Program website includes system characteristics, monitoring data, contacts for all public water systems in Oregon, drinking water standards, fact sheets on contaminants, information on the Safe Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund (including Source Protection Fund Grants), Consumer Confidence Reports, and more: <http://www.healthoregon.org/dwp>

Water systems or community members interested in the potential of developing drinking water protection strategies should contact the respective DEQ and OHA coordinators. Those systems using surface water sources should initially

contact Julie Harvey, Drinking Water Protection Program Coordinator, DEQ, Portland, (503) 229-5664. Groundwater-based water systems should initially contact Tom Pattee, Groundwater Coordinator, OHA, Springfield, (541) 726-2587 x24. As the state moves further into the protection phase of the Oregon program, DEQ and OHA will be able to direct individual requests for assistance to specific staff trained and experienced in that area, both within the state agencies and in other partner organizations.

#### **Alternative formats**

Documents can be provided upon request in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request a document in another format or language, call DEQ in Portland at 503-229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696; or email [deqinfo@deq.state.or.us](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us).