Fact Sheet

Oregon's Source Water Assessment Methodology

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Risk levels for potential contaminant sources

In 1996, new amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act required states to develop source water assessments for all community water systems. Source water assessments provide the water systems and communities with more detailed information on the water that is the source of their drinking water, whether from a well, spring or intake. The assessment also describes potential risks within that area. Public water systems and local communities can use the information in the assessments to voluntarily develop and implement drinking water protection strategies.

This fact sheet provides general information on how the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality developed the list of potential contaminant sources and associated risk ratings for Oregon's Source Water Assessment and Updated Source Water Assessment Reports for public water systems. See DEQ's Source Water Assessment web page the companion fact sheet for an overall summary of all methods used in the assessments.

Source water assessment plan development

Implementation of The Safe Drinking Water Act 1996 Amendments details how the state of Oregon accomplished the source water assessment requirements in the act. The framework for producing source water assessments in Oregon was developed through a public process that met federal mandatory and state public involvement requirements. This process included an advisory committee using a broad cross section of interested parties including technical and policy experts. DEQ submitted Oregon's Source Water Assessment Plan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency which approved it in 1999.

Potential contaminants of concern

One element of the source water assessments is providing an inventory of potential contaminants of concern located within the water system's drinking water source area. The advisory committee focused primarily on potential sources of contaminants regulated under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, including contaminants with a maximum contaminant level, contaminants regulated under the Surface Water Treatment Rule, and microorganisms. DEQ defined significant sources of contamination as any facility or activity that stores, uses, or produces the contaminants of concern and has a sufficient likelihood of releasing those contaminants to the environment at levels that could contribute significantly to the presence of these contaminants in the source waters of the public water supply.

Risk for potential contaminants

Based on the type of facility and nature of potential contaminants used, different contaminant sources can represent a low, moderate or high risk to the water system. The advisory committee that developed the state's Source Water Assessment Plan also developed the risk ratings for potential contaminant sources. The advisory committee's goal was to assess potential impact, or risk, from various land uses and activities using worst-case

assumptions. For example, worst case scenario could mean the facility or activity is not employing good management practices or using pollution prevention techniques or technologies.

Due to the time and resource constraints in developing assessments for every public water system in the state, it was not possible for the advisory committee to develop risk ratings that are reflective of all local conditions. The advisory committee developed relative risk ratings for over 100 potential contaminant sources from a state-wide perspective. The ratings are therefore a high-level summary of state-wide risks across multiple land use categories and facility types. The potential risks may not present actual risks to the water system if contaminants are handled and used properly, or when best management practices are employed.

Enhancing the inventory

For any water system interested in voluntarily developing a local protection plan or local protection strategies, the next step is to conduct an enhanced inventory that looks at site-specific practices within the context of the drinking water source area(s). The source water assessments provide a broad view of the information and is meant to be supplemented and refined with local knowledge from the water system, community, and other interested parties. Refinement of potential risk from sources of contamination can also be accomplished through further research and coordination with state agencies.

For more information

To obtain a copy of the source water assessment report for your water system:

Contact your public water system owner/operator to review the full report or get a copy. Information for public water systems, including a contact person, is available at the Oregon Health Authority Drinking Water Program website (see "Data Online").

DEQ and OHA also have copies of source water assessment reports. Surface water system reports and information for requesting groundwater system reports are available through DEQ's assessment website or by contacting Drinkingwater.Protection@deq.oregon.gov.

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