

MEMORANDUM

State of Alaska

Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Environmental Health

To: James Weise, Drinking Water Program Manager

Through: Chris Miller, EPS III

From: Wellhead Protection Advisory Council

Date: April 20, 2007

Regarding: Review and Recommendations for Changes to Alaska's Wellhead Protection Program.

Over the last six months Alaska's Wellhead Protection Advisory Council (WPAC) reconvened for a series of meetings on 9/14/06, 10/06/06, 11/15/06, 1/06/07 and 3/06/07 to review the current status of the Wellhead Protection Program and make recommendations on how to increase drinking water protection efforts in Alaska. A total of 80 invitations were mailed to public, private and non-profit organizations throughout Alaska asking for their participation in the Wellhead Protection Advisory Council meetings.

The following individuals actively participated in the WPAC meetings: Carrie Godden and Hilary Currey, Alaska Rural Water Association; Bill Kranich, Water System Services; Jim Ridgway, Anchorage Well and Pump Services; Mike Rieser, SLR Corporation; Mark Spano, AWWU; Jennifer Parker and Rick Green, USEPA Region 10; and Chris Miller, Adam Pigg and Kathy Kastens, ADEC-Drinking Water Program.

This letter is being written to summarize the issues discussed and present the recommendations made by the WPAC. It is hoped these recommendations will be supported by the Drinking Water Program and incorporated into existing policy and, if needed, Alaska Statutes.

1.) Issue: Although it appears minor, there is a perceived identity issue with the Wellhead Protection Program. The term Wellhead Protection is traditionally used because the funding source is from EPA-State Revolving Fund Set-Aside Program for "Wellhead Protection". Wellhead Protection does not acknowledge our involvement with the protection of surface water sources used as a public drinking water source. The use of Wellhead Protection, Source Water Protection and Drinking Water Protection often leads to confusion among the public.

- **Recommend:** *It is recommended the terminology Drinking Water Source Protection (DWSP) be used to describe the program and the protection plans created. This term incorporates wellhead protection and surface water protection and emphasizes the efforts placed on source water protection strategies rather system operations. Although long, it is believed that this terminology correctly describes the mission of the section.*

2.) Issue: The Drinking Water Protection Program is voluntary and there has been little interest by community water systems to develop and implement a Drinking Water Source Protection Plan. Few systems have voluntarily chosen to develop and implement a Drinking Water Source Protection Plan using the criteria listed in ADEC's Wellhead Protection Management CD-ROM. However, a recent survey completed by ADEC's Drinking Water staff identified over 40 water systems that are currently implementing some form of source water protection. The survey results were encouraging and suggests further effort is needed to get a clear understanding of current protection efforts and recognize those systems that are proactively protecting their source of drinking water.

- **Recommend:** *Redefine the State of Alaska’s definition of Initial Implementation and Substantial Implementation of Drinking Water Source Protection Plans. (See Attachment 1 for the recommended definitions). The proposed definition creates two options for Community Water Systems to obtain an ADEC endorsed Drinking Water Source Protection Plan.*
- **Recommend:** *Effort needs to be made to identify current protection efforts occurring within a watershed and give public water systems credit for these activities. This may require assistance outside of the Drinking Water Source Protection staff e.g. intern or consultant.*

3.) Issue: Although EPA does not ask that ADEC report on Non-Transient/Non-Community (NTNC) or Transient Non-Community Water Systems, it is important that these systems do not get overlooked.

- **Recommend:** *NTNC and TNC systems will complete a checklist provided by ADEC. The checklist will have protection strategies to mitigate against a variety of potential contaminant sources. A system can identify the strategies they choose to implement. When the checklist is submitted to ADEC, the checklist becomes an ADEC endorsed protection plan. (See Attachment 2).*

4.) Issue: If protection plans are to remain voluntary, incentives need to be in place for systems to develop and implement the plans.

- **Recommend:** *Current regulations state that water systems may qualify for a reduced Sanitary Survey if they are determined to have “Outstanding Performance” as determined by ADEC. The creation and implementation of a Drinking Water Source Protection Plan should be one component of “Outstanding Performance”. Existing systems already qualifying for reduced sanitary survey frequency will be grandfathered. QA/QC audits of the plan should be required to confirm implementation.*
- **Recommend:** *Drinking Water Source Protection Plans should be considered when reviewing SOC/OOC monitoring waivers and identifying sensitive systems impacted by the Ground Water Rule.*
- **Recommend:** *Drinking Water Source Protection Plans should be considered when qualifying for grant and loan programs. The implementation of such program needs to be developed within the division/agency administering the loans/grants. The DW Program will work with other programs and agencies on the possibility of including Drinking Water Source Protection Plan in the scoring process for grant and loan priority ranking. However, it is recommended that a system should not be denied a grant or loan based solely on the existence or lack of a DWSP.*
- **Recommend:** *A mechanism for funding the development and implementation of Drinking Water Source Protection Plans needs to be further developed. One option that should be explored is the integration with the Division of Water’s grant and loan program. Alaska Clean Water Actions grant program was established to help coordinate funding projects from different agencies, ADEC, DNR, ADFG but it seems to overlook interagency coordination. A loan program for protection activities tied directly into the ACWA grant process appears to be an efficient way of introducing such a program.*
- **Recommend:** *Incorporate Drinking Water Source Protection Plans into the approval of separation distance waivers for wastewater discharge and large capacity onsite septic systems.*

5.) Issue: There appears to be a duplication of protection efforts throughout the state. Often many of the protection strategies recommended by Watershed groups are the same protection strategies being recommended by the Drinking Water Program but there is no link between the two.

- **Recommend:** Increase communication and coordination with Division of Water, Watershed groups, IGAP and ARWA. Identify drinking water protection areas and allow secure access to the datasets for others to use when developing Watershed Plans. All datasets should be protected with “Read Only” privileges.
- **Recommend:** The Drinking Water Program needs to coordinate with the Division of Information and Administrative Services (DIAS) to assure that there is secure user friendly way for agency staff to review established Drinking Water Source Protection Areas through the GIS application the agency currently has.
- **Recommend:** A public drinking water systems (well or intake) that exists in a watershed containing impaired water bodies should be taken into account when approving the funding of ACWA projects. Currently the only overlap between Drinking Water Protection and ACWA occurs between impaired water bodies used as public drinking water sources. ADEC needs to take a step back and look at projects that will also lead to the protection of drinking water sources within the watershed of all impaired water bodies.
- **Recommend:** Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Alaska Rural Water Association outlining how Drinking Water Source Protection and ARWA can work together efficiently to increase protection efforts throughout Alaska.

6.) Issue: Current efforts focus on training and educating the owners and operators of public water systems about the benefits of developing and implementing Drinking Water Protection Plans. To date these efforts have not been successful.

- **Recommend:** Education and outreach should occur at the Borough, Municipal or community level. Maps of Borough’s and Municipalities Drinking Water Source Protection areas and potential sources of contamination should be distributed along with informational packets on the costs and benefits of protecting their drinking water source.

7.) Issue: There is very little Alaskan specific information available on strategies that borough, municipalities, communities and owners/operators can utilize to protect their source of drinking water.

- **Recommend:** Modify the Drinking Water Source Protection website to include more information on successful strategies used in other states. Information and resources, such as educational fact sheets, Best Management Strategies and references to current protection efforts occurring in Alaska should be available to assist with the development of protection plans.
- **Recommend:** Develop a list of Best Management Practices that is integrated with the results of Source Water Assessments (See Attachment 3)
- **Recommend:** Create a list of current public water systems that have developed and are implementing an ADEC endorsed Drinking Water Source Protection Plan. This list should be available on the Drinking Water Programs website and be updated frequently.

8.) Issue: There are many new public water systems that currently do not have a Source Water Assessment and older systems that need to have their SWA updated.

- **Recommend:** Identify strategies that can be used with current funding to complete and update SWA reports. Once SWA reports are completed efforts need to be place into field verification QA/QC of the data obtained during the assessment. Additional staff resources are needed for this to be completed. The hiring of additional ADEC staff or contracting these duties to a third party needs to be explored.

9.) Issue: Should Drinking Water Source Protection Plans be mandatory for all public water systems?

- **Recommend:** *At this time it is felt that Drinking Water Source Protection Plans should continue to be voluntary. However, there should be more incentives attached to encourage systems to develop and implement an endorsed Drinking Water Source Protection Plan. If the implementation of these recommendations does not result in increased protection efforts, mandatory plans should be considered in the future.*

The Wellhead Protection Advisory Council thanks you for the opportunity to provide input into developing and changing current strategies in order to increase drinking water protection efforts throughout Alaska. We look forward to receiving your response on the recommendations made.