

# *Maryland's Source Water Assessment Program*

## **Background**

The 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments require states to develop and implement source water assessment programs to evaluate the safety of all public drinking water systems. States are required to develop these programs with public input and to submit draft descriptions of their programs to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by February 1999. The draft submittals must outline the methods that each state will use to define and evaluate risks to each public drinking water system. States must complete the assessments by May of 2003.

## **What Is Source Water Assessment?**

Source Water Assessment is a process for evaluating the vulnerability to contamination of the source of a public drinking water supply. The assessment does not address the treatment processes, or the storage and distribution aspects of the water system, which are covered under separate provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

There are three main steps in the assessment process: delineating the drainage area that is likely to contribute to the drinking water supply, identifying potential contaminants within that area and assessing the vulnerability of the system to those contaminants. Maryland will look at many factors when determining the vulnerability of a water supply to contamination, including the size and type of water system, the characteristics of the potential contaminants and the capacity of the natural environment to attenuate any risk.

## **What Drinking Water Systems Must States Assess?**

States must evaluate all public drinking water systems. These include three major categories: community systems, nontransient noncommunity systems, and transient noncommunity systems. Community systems are water systems that serve 25 or more year-round residents, and include many small communities as well as large systems such as the Baltimore City Water System and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. Nontransient noncommunity systems serve 25 or more individuals each day who regularly use the water system for 6 months per year or more. The nontransient noncommunity systems include such facilities as schools and places of employment that use their own wells. The transient noncommunity systems serve 25 or more people daily, but not the same people every day. Restaurants and campgrounds with their own wells are typical transient noncommunity water systems. Domestic wells serving individual homes are not included in this program.

Maryland has more than 3,700 public drinking water systems. Most of these (about 72 percent) are transient noncommunity systems. Approximately 50 of Maryland's public drinking water systems obtain their water from surface supplies, either from a reservoir or directly from a river intake. The remaining systems use ground water sources.

## **Where Is Maryland In The Process?**

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is the lead agency in Maryland for developing the Source Water Assessment Program. MDE began developing the program in October 1997, and has submitted a final draft to meet EPA's February 1999 deadline. Both a Technical Advisory Group (representing public water systems, various government agencies, industry associations, and the Potomac and Susquehanna River Commissions) and a Citizens Advisory Group (representing various environmental and political organizations, watershed protection groups, and health organizations)

provided significant input in the development of this program. The EPA approved Maryland's Plan in November, 1999. Maryland plans to complete the assessment process by the May 2003 deadline.

### **How Does Maryland Plan to Complete the Assessment Process?**

Maryland's Source Water Assessment Program outlines a plan to use a computerized geographic information system to analyze data for each water supply. Overlay maps for the analysis will include the locations of intakes and wells, the defined area of contribution for the water supply, land use and the locations of potential contaminant sources. Water quality data from each water system will provide additional information about what contaminants may be present or pose a risk to the water supply source. The final assessment document for each system will include a narrative description of the mapping effort and an explanation of the likely vulnerability of the water supply to any contaminants that might affect the safety of that supply. Local governments and water suppliers, in partnership with MDE, will be able to use this assessment information to develop protection programs to improve the integrity of each water supply.

### **How Can You Become Involved?**

For more information about Maryland's Source Water Assessment Program, please contact MDE at (410) 537-3714. Your comments are welcome as Maryland implements this program.

Contact your local water supplier or water advisory group to become involved in the protection of your local water supply.



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