

PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

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Kansas Water Office

Under Kansas law (K.S.A. 65-162a) a public water supply system is defined as "...a system for the provision to the public of piped water for human consumption, if such system has at least ten (10) service connections or regularly serves an average of at least twenty-five (25) individuals daily at least sixty (60) days out of the year. Such term includes any source, treatment, storage or distribution facilities under control of the operator of the system and used primarily in connection with the system and any source treatment, storage or distribution facilities not under such control but which are used in connection with such system."

Kansas has approximately 1,100 public water supply systems. Public water supply systems are typically managed by a public entity, such as a municipality or a rural water district, but may be managed by a private entity as well. The governing bodies of public water supply systems bear primary responsibility for providing an adequate supply of high quality drinking water to the public.

Kansas' goal is to insure that all federal and state drinking water quality standards are met and capacity development goals are achieved by public water suppliers. Regulation of public water supply systems is accomplished through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's Public Water Supply Program. The Department administers all requirements of the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act with statutory authority identified in K.S.A. 65-171m.

Kansas public water supply systems face challenges beyond complying with drinking water standards. Old, deteriorating delivery facilities may contribute to excess loss of water through leaks. The system obviously does not receive payment for water lost to leaks, which can lead to a serious loss of revenue. Rapid growth in some areas is taxing the ability of public water supply systems to keep pace. In some areas, drought or long-term reductions in streamflow have reduced water supplies and caused problems, bringing the capacity of some water systems into question. Also, a surprising number of small communities

are dependent upon a single well and face hardship should that well suddenly go out of service.

In eastern Kansas, the primary source of water is surface water; the state's rivers, federal reservoirs, multipurpose small lakes and municipal lakes. In western Kansas, the primary source is ground water drawn from wells that reach into the water bearing aquifers. While 68% of the State's public water systems rely upon ground water sources, these systems serve only 29% of the population.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment Drinking Water Program indicates that in 2000, the overall compliance rate with monitoring or Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL) for Kansas public water supply systems was 85%. A total of 165 systems incurred at least one violation of a drinking water regulation. This means that 957 of the 1,098 systems operating had no violations in 2000. Ninety-one percent of the Kansas population was served by water systems in compliance with federal and state drinking water regulations. Only 9% or 223,589 people were affected by water systems that had monitoring or Maximum Contaminant Level violations.

Although Kansas has a good record of compliance with drinking water standards, public water suppliers still face many challenges in continuing to do so. In an effort to meet these challenges the state has two financial assistance programs available. The Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund has provided \$122 million in low interest loans since 1998 to public water suppliers to help them meet their increasing responsibilities under the Safe Drinking Water Act. In 2001, the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing provided a total of \$4,044,515 in Community Development Block Grant Program grants to low and moderate-income utilities for water supply projects.

In addition to financial assistance to meet public water supply challenges, the State encourages the development of regional public water supply systems. Regionalization of public

water supply service in Kansas usually involves formation of a public wholesale water supply district. Wholesale water supply districts are commonly comprised of several member municipalities or rural water districts that may rely upon the water provided by the wholesale district to supplement their own water supply sources or to provide their entire water supply. Wholesale districts provide the advantages of economies of scale that commonly are not available to their individual members. Wholesale districts generally use a reliable water supply source such as a Kansas Water Marketing Program contract from a federal lake or a multipurpose small lake and have a newer water treatment plant that can readily be upgraded to meet more stringent Safe Drinking Water Act requirements as they become effective. Twenty-three public wholesale water supply districts have been organized in Kansas, to date. Not all of these districts are actively delivering water. Several have been organized recently and have not yet had the time to develop the infrastructure to deliver water. Others were formally organized but never became operational.

Kansas has many small public water suppliers that would benefit from participation in a regional water supply system. Regionalization is a key state strategy for ensuring that small systems attain and maintain technical, financial and managerial capacity. Regionalization is further encouraged by Kansas statute. K.S.A. 65-163g (2) states that the secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment shall, “in consultation with the Kansas Water Office, encourage regional cooperative public water supply projects in accordance with the public water supply

regionalization strategy of the state water plan;...” In addition, the development of regional systems provides a mechanism for the efficient distribution of water supplies for municipal use from state-owned storage in federal lakes and multipurpose small lakes. Priority for state funding should encourage water supply planning and construction projects that are cost-effective.

Under the authority of the *Kansas Water Plan* public water supply strategies will be developed for the 12 major river basins in Kansas, taking into consideration that some strategies may cross basin boundaries based on the service areas of the public water suppliers in the basin or available supplies. A primary focus will be placed on the use of existing water supply sources. These sources can be state or locally owned and controlled. If assessment indicates a shortage of water, development of new or restoration/enhancement of existing sources will be included in the strategy. Basin strategies will differ from east to west based upon the dependence on surface water or ground water as the source of supply, distance between suppliers or other factors. Implementation of the basin strategies may include development of regional systems.

Additional Information

Further information on this subject or on many other *Kansas Water Plan* related programs can be obtained from: Kansas Water Office, 901 S. Kansas Avenue, Topeka, KS 66612-1249, phone (785-296-3185), toll free (888-KAN-WATER) or check our WEB site at www.kwo.org.