

**2019 Legislative Recommendations
Legislative Water Commission
Increase MDH Drinking Water Service Connection Fee
October 2018**

Issue: Increase MDH Drinking Water Service Connection Fee

What's needed: Legislation?

A 4) Increase funding to ensure the safety of publicly-supplied drinking water. Legislation to increase the MDH drinking-water service-connection fee. This needed increase will allow MDH to complete condition assessments and asset management plans for drinking-water supply systems



Background: The safety of our drinking water is one of the most critical responsibilities of government. Safe drinking water has been key in some of the greatest public health achievements of the last half-century, including the dramatic reductions in disease and improvements in longevity. The value of our water resources goes beyond human health and the health of our environment. Jobs and economic development also depend on communities having a reliable source of clean and safe water. Investments in water systems not only provide assurances of continued delivery of safe drinking water, they are key to local economies.

Public Drinking Water Supply Systems

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) initially focused on water treatment. However, over the years it has been amended to encompass other things, including source water protection, water-operator training, communication, and loans for capital improvements needed by public water systems to remain in compliance with SDWA. The SDWA ensures that water is safe to drink by using standards for a variety of contaminants, both naturally occurring and those that result from human and animal activity. The SDWA affects all water systems that serve water to the public. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has delegated authority from the EPA for regulating nearly 7,000 public water supply systems in the state. In addition, MDH regulates about 6,000 “non-community” systems that provide water to people in schools, lodging facilities, and businesses that are not connected to community water systems.

How does the State Protect and Provide Safe Drinking Water?

Protecting water sources, treating water, and testing water after it is treated are safeguards that assure an adequate supply of water that is safe to drink. The Clean Water, Land, and Legacy amendment to the State’s constitution in 2008 was a clear call to protect Minnesota’s sources of drinking water. Funding from this amendment helps communities build and improve drinking water infrastructure that complies with standards in the Safe Drinking Water Act. It provides support to smaller communities to ensure their citizens are provided safe and affordable drinking water, which is a core public health function. The MDH ensures safe and sufficient public drinking water supplies through a strategic series of safeguards from sources in rivers, lakes and groundwater until the drinking water reaches the tap. The safeguards include basic strategies of protection, prevention, treatment and monitoring.

Plan reviews and construction inspections are key strategies for drinking water protection. They help identify potential problems that may allow contaminants to enter drinking water in wells, treatment, storage, and distribution systems. These also help protect financial investments in infrastructure and to identify problems before construction and operation. Plan reviews ensure proper construction for new and renovated drinking water infrastructure. These reviews affect public health, avoiding possible cross connections and improper treatment of water to comply with construction standards and ultimately the SDWA. These reviews save communities hundreds of thousands of dollars each year by having corrections made in the design phase rather than having to make costly modifications during the construction phase. Construction inspections are completed for all Drinking Water Revolving Fund (DWRF) projects, with the exception of water mains. Monitoring results ensure that public water systems in the state are safe and free of harmful contamination.

Minnesota's rivers and aquifers provide drinking water to millions of people. To sustain our future, we need to manage water resources wisely to protect and enhance their value. This includes maintaining and improving water infrastructure systems. Insights about drinking water assist state and local agencies and citizens in being proactive to help prepare for the future of our drinking water protection. Threats from arsenic, bacteria, lead, spills, harmful algal blooms, pesticides and nitrate contamination can be met. To address these threats we need to expand efforts to include the following priority recommendation for protecting our drinking water. This recommendation represent a consensus built on published documents as well as input from stakeholders, agency staff and Legislative Water Commission Members

The Safe Drinking Water Fee ensures that Minnesota's strategic approach to safe drinking water. MDH staff build relationships with public drinking water operators that result in extensive knowledge of systems, trust, and a willingness to take action before they violate safe drinking water standards. They conduct water quality testing for 7,000 systems across the state, which assures correct sampling procedures and accurate results, and prompts action before there are severe problems. This cost-effective assistance results in over 99% compliance year after year.

However, inadequate funding and new threats jeopardize this approach and the safety of our drinking water, The Safe Drinking Water Fee directly funds regulatory and technical assistance services for public drinking water systems. This request is to increase the fee from \$6.36 to \$9.72 per connection to a community water system. The current fee has been in place since 2005. During that time, MDH costs have increased twenty-eight percent due to inflation. Other new costs are due to new threats to drinking water; like pharmaceuticals and harmful algal blooms.

Safe and reliable drinking water is essential for everyone. Small, rural systems have fewer resources for testing, investigations, and physical improvements because of their smaller customer bases. For example, the cost of a nitrate treatment plant is \$430 per household in Hastings, whereas it is \$7,900 per household in Clear Lake. Smaller systems have more difficulty meeting water standards. MDH services are especially helpful to these communities. Without additional funding, the MDEH will need to reduce services, leaving systems with a greater burden of sampling and reduced technical assistance from our specialized engineers and sanitarians. Instead of anticipating and addressing problems in advance, MDH staff will chase results and follow up on monitoring violations with less time to prevent contamination.

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