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Questions & Answers

Sanitary Survey Fee Change

What is a sanitary survey?

A sanitary survey is an inspection of a public water system’s facilities, operations, and records. The inspection is one of the ways we identify conditions that may present a public health risk. The state drinking water rule ([chapter 246-290 WAC](#)) requires all Group A public drinking water systems to have a routine sanitary survey once every 3-5 years. About 1,000 sanitary surveys are conducted by the Office of Drinking Water, local health jurisdictions (LHJs), and contract surveyors each year.

What are the changes to the sanitary survey fees?

Surveys we perform

The fee for sanitary surveys done by the Department of Health will change in January 2014. We will no longer charge a fixed sanitary survey fee for surveys we perform on water systems serving fewer than 10,000 connections. We will base the fee for surveys we perform on the actual number of hours spent preparing for, conducting, and documenting the survey. Our [WAC 246-290-990](#) requires a charge of \$102 per hour for the surveys we perform.

There will be no change to the way we calculate the sanitary survey fee for water systems serving more than 10,000 connections. We will continue to charge \$102 per hour for these surveys.

Surveys performed by LHJs that don’t charge their own fee

The \$102 hourly fee doesn’t apply to LHJ surveys because we can’t be accountable for the time spent by a local health jurisdiction. Also, there is no connection between the \$102 hour fee in our rule and the LHJ’s cost or our cost when the LHJ conducts the survey. Therefore, a fixed fee will continue to be charged for surveys performed by LHJs and private contractors.

The fee charged for surveys performed by private contract surveyors and by LHJs that don’t charge their own fee will change as follows:

- The fixed survey fee charged to noncommunity systems serving three or fewer connections will decrease from \$510 to \$400.
- The fixed survey fees charged for larger noncommunity water systems and for all community systems will increase from \$510 to \$600.



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Surveys performed by LHJs that charge their own fee

The fee charged for surveys performed by LHJs that charge their own fee is subject to the LHJ's own local fee schedule. These fees may or may not change in 2014.

Why are we making this change?

The sanitary survey program is a designated fee-supported activity in our drinking water rule (chapter 246-290 WAC), but we don't recover all of our program costs. Over \$800,000 in program costs are not recovered directly from sanitary survey fees paid by water systems. The state general fund and our EPA federal funds pay for the unrecovered costs.

These changes will help us be less dependent on shrinking state general funds, continue to meet our program obligations, and establish a more sustainable fee-for-service basis for this mission-critical activity. These changes will also allow us to comply with rule requirements that we charge by the hour for sanitary surveys we perform (WAC 246-290-990).

How will these changes be implemented?

When a LHJ or contractor does the survey

Sanitary surveys for most small water systems, serving fewer than 100 connections, are assigned to the LHJ or a private third-party contract surveyor. Each year, over 65 percent of all surveys are completed by a LHJ or private contract surveyor. Water systems will know in advance the cost of a sanitary survey performed by LHJs.

For some small water systems, we do the survey because of unique issues, such as compliance, complex treatment, or complaints.

Surveys we perform

For the surveys we perform, it will no longer be possible to identify the sanitary survey fee before completing the survey. Our surveyors will track and report their time spent on certain sanitary survey activities. We will apply the rule-mandated hourly charge of \$102 for these survey activities:

- Survey research and preparation.
- Survey field work.
- Survey documentation, including preparation of a survey report.

Water systems serving fewer than 10,000 connections will not pay for the time our staff spends traveling to and from the survey site, providing extra technical assistance, or any post-field work follow-up with the purveyor. Those costs and related expenses will continue to be subsidized with federal and state funds. We will also subsidize all general survey program and administrative costs.

For more information

Call your ODW regional office.

Eastern Region: Spokane 509-329-2100

Northwest Region: Kent 253-395-6750

Southwest Region: Tumwater 360-236-3030

For people with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY call 711).