

Can the County or State Regulate my water system?

To determine if your state or county has regulatory authority over your system, you first need to determine what type of water system you have. Please refer to the FAQ “What kind of water system do I have?” to help you determine the classification of your water system. You may need to do some research to get accurate information to follow the decision tree in that FAQ.

In general, if your water system serves fewer than 25 people and there are fewer than 15 connections (houses or properties connected) your water system is not subject to regulatory water sampling, documentation, permitting and other types of oversight.

If your water system has 15 or more connections OR more than 25 people that use it, your system is regulated. The more people/ connections the system has & the more non-transient user; the more comprehensive and more frequent testing and monitoring by qualified operators and laboratories is required.

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) passed in 1975 gave responsibility for administering the SDWA to the US Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA sets Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL’s) and the types of contaminants tested for, delegate enforcement to state agencies, provides funds in the form of grants to aid the states in implementing the SDWA, monitors state activities, continues to research drinking water contaminants and treatment methodologies.

In California, systems with more than 200 service connections are regulated by the state, while systems with less than 200 connections are overseen by the county. In our area the cities/towns of St. Helena, Angwin, Calistoga, Yountville and Napa, Santa Rosa, etc... are all State regulated water systems, while the smaller rural community systems in the valleys and surrounding hills that have 30, 70 or even 150 connections are regulated by the county department of environmental resources.

Out of compliance water systems trigger a county/state processes designed to bring those systems back into compliance. Systems that are not sampling their water for required contaminants, have high levels of contaminants, are not delivering water or have insufficient reserve/back up water supplies; are subject to increasing scrutiny. If the situation is not corrected, the increasing levels of scrutiny can lead to legal action. In some cases, this legal action results in one-time or daily fines imposed until the corrective action is taken. In extreme cases, when corrective action is ignored, the result is the county or state taking the water system over, contracting for corrective action and billing the water system/water system users for the costs involved in the form of high water rates.