

RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES

Who, What and Why?

By Tim Tice Groundwater Specialist

For the past two years, there has been much written about drinking water protection plans, emergency response, and vulnerability of water systems.

With this latest article, I would like to bring into perspective, the reasons behind the protection of YOUR drinking water. Drinking water protection plans (DWPP) are simply a gathering of information that will assist a community with the understanding of aspects that may influence the quality of your water in an ill-mannered way. When such information is gathered; you as a water operator, or mayor or city council will begin to realize that you haven't much control in the protection of YOUR water. Yet, who do the consumers call when their water doesn't come out of the tap or tastes bad?

One important factor in drinking water protection is the understanding of a significant component to the DWPP, and those are Responsible Management Authorities (RMA). A Responsible Management Authority by definition is: The public water system whose water supply is being protected and any governmental entity with management, rule or ordinance making authority to implement wellhead (drinking water) protection management strategies within the wellhead (drinking water) protection area. In layman's terms: Those who have control over the usage of land either through activities (on a small scale) or governing body (on a large scale).

An RMA can include cities, counties, special districts, Indian tribes, state / federal government entities as well as public water systems. *Oregon's Wellhead Protection Program Guidance Manual*

Let me regress for a moment and explain how an RMA is determined.

When a DWPP is developed, the first thought is, "Where does the water come from?" If you have a surface water system, it's pretty easy to look up stream and understand where your water comes from, but there is more to it than that. If you have a ground water system, most of us would say, "The

water comes out of the ground," yet again there is more to it than that.

Through a series of efforts performed by state agencies, the process of determining where our water comes from has been significantly made easier. The state provides mapping for public water systems showing the natural reservoir supplying ground water to the well or in the way of surface water, the water shed is defined. There are many factors to determine the water supply, something we will not get into. Now you are shown a map approximating an area of where the water originates, so now what?

With the understanding of where the water comes from, we can collectively go out and compare the boundaries on the map to understand the level of limitations you have with the physical borders.

Example: You are viewing the map showing the approximation of your water boundaries, and you make your mind up to pinpoint the borders on the map to perimeters in the real world. After traveling a good distance from the wellhead or water intake, reaching the outline of the protection area, you have come to a conclusion that you do not own the property that you have traveled across. How much control over a section of land do you have if you do not own it? A Responsible Management Authority has just been discovered and now is the time to establish, "who oversees the activities on this parcel, or that parcel. Now is the time to go and speak with the RMA's who fall within the boundaries of where it is thought that YOUR water comes from.

Now remember, an RMA has jurisdictional authority over the land that they control. We also include individuals who may also control the activities on large acreages of land as well as businesses that may be operating inside the boundaries of the drinking water protection area. We contact these RMA's for the specific purpose of inviting them to join us at an informal meeting. During such a meeting, an outline designates the RMAs within the protection area and asks them to recognize the areas in regard to water protection.

A good example of an RMA, is the Bureau of Land Management. Past experiences have shown a greater effort from the BLM in the recognition of land management for the protection of source water.

Their activities incorporated into the Forest Management Plan takes into account a greater emphasis towards water protection.

As a water operator or a community operated water system, your efforts are not put towards making an RMA change their operating procedures, but to merely bring about a higher awareness towards water protection in the area.

Businesses all operate quite differently in handling hazardous materials, but it is not only hazardous materials that should be a concern. Categories to determine a potential contaminant source are broken down into four groups, A) commercial / industrial, B) agricultural / rural, C) residential / municipal and D) miscellaneous. All these groups in one way or another **may** contribute to water pollution.

Water pollution is the exact reason for the development of drinking water protection plans. It has been estimated that it costs approximately 100 times the amount of money to remediate already polluted water for usage than to implement practices to protect the water source.

Water is a valuable resource, and the depletion of that source through consumption or pollution can lead to drastic measures taken by a community. Unlike the depletion of gasoline, (another subject) you can always put on your shoes and walk. Without water a community is sure to be forced to scatter to other areas.

So I ask: “Do you feel comfortable with the control you have over the boundaries with which YOUR water comes?” Even if you feel that drinking water protection isn’t high on your priority list of things to do, consider those activities that may raise havoc with YOUR water.

Ask yourself how you can better place an emphasis on “WATER PROTECTION” with those inside your drinking water protection area. To find the information of where your water protection area is, look at the Source Water Assessment sent to you by the state agencies. The intrinsic values may never be determined, but as information is shared, it will only become second nature with those living inside the drinking water protection area. In the spring issue of H2Oregon, I intend to outline those potential contaminant sources that a drinking water

protection plan tries to conclude **may** pollute the water source. The article will outline how pollution occurs.

I hope the holidays are good for you. The best that life has to offer! Mr. OpTIMist