

What is a Satellite Management Agency?

Satellite Management Agencies (SMAs) are entities authorized by the Department of Health (DOH) to own and/or manage and operate public water systems within an approved area of service.

There are many small water systems in Washington State. Many of these small water systems lack the resources to maintain the staff of certified operators needed to ensure the proper operation of their system facilities. SMAs employ DOH certified operators to provide the technical, managerial, and financial oversight for small water systems that they may not be able to provide themselves. SMAs contract with many small water systems to pool resources and allow a few highly qualified operators to ensure safe and reliable drinking water to many customers. SMAs also have the staff to ensure the continued safe operation of water systems when one operator takes vacation or has an illness.

Water systems can enter into one of two types of contracts with an SMA:

- ◆ Ownership – The SMA assumes ownership of the water system and is responsible for all aspects of water system planning, and ensuring the long-term viability of the water system through technical, managerial, and financial oversight
- ◆ Management and Operations – The SMA is responsible for ensuring that the water system is in compliance with applicable regulations, and for providing recommendations pertaining to the financial management of the water system based on the SMAs assessment of the system's infrastructure and long-term viability

Some SMAs choose to offer only ownership or only management and operations services, while other SMAs provide both contract types. The water system owner or board will need to determine which type of contract is appropriate for their system's needs.

For More Information

If you have questions about Satellite Management Agencies, call our regional office:

- ◆ **Eastern Region**
Spokane Valley
509-329-2100
- ◆ **Northwest Region**
Kent
253-395-6750
- ◆ **Southwest Region**
Tumwater
360-236-3030
- ◆ **Headquarters**
Tumwater
SMA & Training Coordinator
360-236-3100
dw.sma@doh.wa.gov

Drinking water publications are online at doh.wa.gov/odwpubs.

Related Publications

- WAC 246-291** Group B Regulation
- WAC 246-295** Satellite Management Agencies
- RCW 70.119A.060** Conditions for Approval or Creation of New Public Water Systems



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This and other publications are available at www.doh.gov/eph/dw.



Choosing a Satellite Management Agency for Your Group B Water System

Why should my Group B water system contract with an SMA?

The highest priority of the SMA program is to allow you to make sure that you, your family and those that visit your residence or business have safe and reliable drinking water available to them through your public water system.

Washington drinking water regulations require that all public water systems approved after January 1, 1995 be owned or operated by an SMA in perpetuity unless an SMA is not available. This requirement applies to both Group A and Group B water systems.

In addition to ensuring that your water system is in compliance with Washington State regulations, contracting with an SMA assures sound technical, managerial, and financial water system oversight. Running a water system, regardless of size, is like running a business. To do so, you must establish a long-term budget for operation and maintenance and provide a high level of customer service. Water systems contracted with SMAs often end up saving money by spending less on unanticipated costs such as emergency repairs.

Most people have little or no experience operating a water system; however, an SMA can apply tested and proven solutions to a system's needs. It can be hard for an individual or small entity to meet these expectations. Contracting with an approved SMA ensures that these expectations are met, and SMA customers can be confident that they are receiving safe and reliable drinking water.



What services should I expect from my SMA?

It's important to note that your SMA is, at a minimum, assuming the duties of a certified operator in responsible charge. Although only Group A water systems require a certified operator, the SMA Rule ensures that Group B water systems will receive, at a minimum, the same level of service and care. The full list of these duties can be found in Washington Administrative Code 246-292-032. In short, these duties are:

- 1 Performing or managing the water system's daily operational and maintenance activities according to acceptable public health practices and water industry standards, and
- 2 An SMA employee must be available on-site or able to be contacted immediately by telephone or other electronic communication twenty-four hours per day, every day, and able to initiate appropriate action within two hours of contact in case of an emergency.

There are certain routine services that fall under the minimum duties of an SMA and that should be included in every SMA contract, including:

- ◆ Consistent water quality monitoring and sampling
- ◆ Routine system assessment and maintenance
- ◆ Financial stability, oversight, and rate filing assistance
- ◆ Emergency preparedness and support
- ◆ Continuity of operations and management
- ◆ Interfacing with local and state health agencies and authorities

The specific services your SMA provides will depend on if you enter into an ownership or a management and operations contract. Because every water system is different, your SMA will work with you to develop a contract for services that best addresses the specific needs of your water system.

How do I work with an SMA to negotiate a contract?

- 1 **Know your water system.** Does your water system draw water from a ground water or surface water source? Does your system require chlorination or another type of treatment? How many customers does your system serve? How old is your system? Does your water system need a specialized operator (such as a Water Treatment Plant Operator)? How healthy are the system's finances? Do you want to contract with an SMA for ownership or for management and operations services?

Financial records, design documents, communications with government agencies, and other records are important to have available.

- 2 **Find out which SMAs serve your area.** The Office of Drinking Water's (ODW) Approved SMA List can be found by visiting doh.wa.gov and searching for "SMA List." The list identifies SMA names and contact information, the counties they serve, and the type of service provided. You can also contact your regional ODW office for assistance.

- 3 **If possible, contact multiple SMAs serving your area.** Have a list of questions ready to gather information about the services, prices, staff, etc. that each SMA can offer your system.

- 4 **Work with the SMA that best fits your water system's needs** to create a contract for ownership or management and operations service. You should feel confident that your SMA contract addresses all the services you expect to receive from your SMA.

- 5 **Keep in contact with your SMA.** Your SMA is there to care for your water system and its customers – don't hesitate to be in contact with your SMA if you have concerns or want to discuss maintenance, rate setting, or other topics pertaining to your water system.

Contracting with an SMA is not only a requirement for most Washington State water systems, but is a great way to ensure that small water systems are well-managed and providing customers with safe and reliable drinking water. SMAs offer their customers confidence that the water flowing from their taps is high quality, so you and your community can focus on other important aspects of life.

