every drop counts

Beech Mountain Water Education/Information Sheet

How Water is Regulated

Drinking water is regulated in many ways. While water quality is primarily regulated at the Federal level through the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are also State agencies which regulate drinking water from initial water plant construction through ongoing operations. The following is a list of agencies that regulate drinking water and a short explanation of what each does.

The EPA has promulgated regulations for more than 90 contaminants. https://www.epa.gov/wqs-tech The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) https://www.epa.gov/sdwa includes a process that EPA uses to identify new contaminants which could affect drinking water and a means to regulate these. Existing water quality standards are discussed in Water Quality Standards, Beech Mountain Water Education.

States also have the authority to set more stringent standards for contaminants regulated by the EPA and they also have the authority to regulate contaminants not regulated by the EPA. For example, California has set some Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) that are more stringent than the SDWA. Illinois, in response to the Flint water crisis, has also begun to set more stringent MCLs for certain contaminants.

North Carolina's Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) is the regulatory authority in the State for public drinking water. Unlike the states mentioned above, North Carolina has not expanded on Federal law in its regulation of drinking water standards. However, North Carolina recently enacted source water protection (SWP) planning for all public water supply systems that treat and supply water from surface sources. Prior to rule adoption, SWP planning in NC was voluntary. The new and expanded SWP planning model includes proactive activities to identify and reduce the risk of contamination, with additional emphasis on reactive emergency response mechanisms. Although SWP planning does not guarantee the absence of contamination, it is an important step for a utility to assess vulnerabilities and to identify strategies that could better protect public health.

The NCDEQ's Water Resources Division has a Drinking Water Protection Program https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/drinking-water/drinking-water-protection-program which consists of a number of components, all designed to protect drinking water sources and production. Any drinking water infrastructure project planned by any public utility must obtain approval from NCDEQ prior to construction. NCDEQ also requires water systems to test and report on water produced by public utilities on an ongoing basis to insure that the water meets all State and Federal standards.