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# Wisconsin's Capacity Development Program for New Public Water Systems



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Capacity development is a program that aims to help public water systems strengthen their ability to consistently supply safe drinking water to their customers. The program focuses on assisting system owners and operators, particularly small water systems, with improving their technical abilities, managerial skills, and financial resources to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requirements.

One of the goals of the Capacity Development Program is to help water systems improve operations and, most importantly, avoid contamination. The Capacity Development Program was authorized by the 1996 amendments to the SDWA, which established a strong new emphasis on preventing contamination problems. Because it focuses on prevention, capacity development is a more proactive and positive program, rather than having an after-the-fact, “regulate and enforce” focus.

Don't let the term mislead you. Capacity, in this sense, does not mean just having enough safe drinking water available for everyone in a community. Rather, it

means that a water system has the technical, managerial, and financial capability to ensure safe drinking water.

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## Three Types of Capacity

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Capacity can be broken down into three distinct, yet highly interrelated, types. They are technical, managerial, and financial capacity. Each type of capacity is defined as follows:

1. **Technical capacity** is the physical and operational ability of a water system to meet the SDWA requirements. It refers to the physical infrastructure of the water system, including source water adequacy, infrastructure adequacy (including well(s) and/or source water intakes, treatment, storage, and distribution), and the ability of system personnel to implement the necessary technical knowledge.
2. **Managerial capacity** is a water system's institutional and administrative capabilities. It refers to the management structure of the water system, including ownership accountability, staffing and organization.

3. **Financial capacity** refers to the financial resources of the water system, including revenue sufficiency, credit worthiness, and fiscal management.

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## What is capacity development?

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Capacity development is the *process* (not a static endpoint) of water systems getting and maintaining adequate funding, management, infrastructure, and operations so they can provide safe drinking water consistently and cost-effectively.

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## The Big Picture

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collected information indicating that many public water systems across the country had problems meeting the requirements of the SDWA because of inadequate water system “capacity.” Many water systems lacked the technical, managerial, or financial capabilities to meet the SDWA requirements.

In Wisconsin only a small fraction of systems – less than one percent – had difficulties meeting the SDWA requirements. This was attributed to the fact that Wisconsin has had a public water system program since 1919 and a SDWA program since 1978. The various components of the existing Wisconsin program (monitoring, approvals, and inspections), along with review of municipal water rates by the Public Service Commission (PSC), were already providing a strong base for developing and maintaining system capacity.

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## Why are we doing this?

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States that do *not* develop and implement a capacity development program will lose 20% of Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) money, which is approximately \$3.2 million of federal funding per year for Wisconsin systems. This money is used to provide low-interest loans to municipal water systems that need to upgrade their facilities.

Enhancing and ensuring the technical, managerial, and financial capacity of water systems offers great potential for correcting and preventing noncompliance with safe drinking water standards and for ensuring reliably safe drinking water. The consumer’s benefit from this initiative is simple: the provision of safe and reliable drinking water in a cost-effective manner.

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## Focus on Small Water Systems

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The 1996 SDWA amendments include initiatives to increase the resources available to small drinking water systems, which often have the most difficult time complying with federal and state regulations.



The most common barriers faced by small systems as they try to acquire and maintain capacity include:

- Lack of technical knowledge about state and federal requirements and how to meet them;
- Lack of access to money;
- Lack of financial planning and management; and
- Lack of affordable technologies to comply with existing and new technologies.

Small water systems, such as schools, factories, and mobile home parks, often don't have specialized staff to run their systems. Providing water is not typically their primary business. Their business is providing other products and services to the public.

## Capacity Development for New Community & Nontransient Noncommunity Systems



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is implementing a program

to ensure that new public water systems demonstrate capacity. Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter NR 809 Subchapter IX requires "capacity evaluations" for all new community and nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) water systems *prior* to construction. This code became effective on September 1, 1999.

### ◆ New Municipal Systems

A capacity evaluation is required for all new municipal systems. The evaluation is completed by the DNR

as part of the system plan review process. Once the plan *and* capacity evaluation are approved, DNR will send a plan approval letter and capacity certification to the owner.

### ◆ New OTM Systems

A capacity evaluation is completed by DNR as part of the plan review process for new Other-than-municipal (OTM) systems. Owners must fill out and sign DNR Form 3300-247 to provide DNR with system capacity information. The capacity evaluation uses much of the information furnished in the water system plan. Once the plan approval is granted and the capacity evaluation is conducted, DNR will send an approval letter and capacity certification to the system owner.



### ◆ New NTNC Systems

Owners of new NTNC systems must complete DNR Form 3300-246. The capacity evaluation process for new NTNC systems is divided into two groups, depending on plan review requirements and pumping capacity as listed **on the next page....**



## Water System Definitions

- ✓ **Public water system:** a system providing water to the public for human consumption through piping, which has at least 15 service connections used by year-round residents or regularly serves at least 25 year-round residents for at least 60 days per year. There are four types of public water systems in Wisconsin.
- ✓ **Community water system:** a public water system which serves at least 15 service connections used by year-round residents or regularly serves at least 25 year-round residents. Any public water system serving 7 or more homes, 10 or more mobile homes, apartment units, or condominiums.
  1. **Municipal system:** a community system that is owned by a county, city, village, town, town sanitary district, utility district, public institution, or a privately owned water utility serving any of the above.
  2. **Other-than-municipal (OTM) system:** a community system that is not owned by a municipality. Examples include mobile home parks, apartment buildings, and condominium associations.
- ✓ **Noncommunity system:** a public water system that is not a community water system.
  3. **Nontransient noncommunity (NTNC) system:** a system that regularly serves at least 25 of the same people over 6 months of the year. Examples include schools, day care centers, factories.
  4. **Transient noncommunity (TNC) system:** a system that serves at least 25 people at least 60 days of the year but does not serve the same 25 people over 6 months of the year. Examples include restaurants, motels, taverns, parks, and campgrounds.

Capacity evaluations are **not** required for new transient noncommunity systems.

1. **NTNC systems subject to DNR plan review** (pumping capacity *greater* than 70 gallons per minute, as well as all schools): A capacity evaluation is completed as part of the plan review. Once the plan approval is granted and the capacity evaluation is conducted, DNR will send an approval letter and capacity certification to the system owner.
2. **NTNC systems NOT subject to DNR plan review** (pumping capacity *less* than 70 gallons per minute): A capacity evaluation must still be performed prior to system construction. Owners should send the completed capacity evaluation form (3300–246) to: Capacity Development Coordinator, Wisconsin DNR, DG/5, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921. Once the capacity evaluation is conducted by the DNR, an approval letter with capacity certification will be sent to the system owner.

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## Capacity Development Program for Existing Public Water Systems

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To meet the requirements of the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act amendments, DNR prepared a capacity development strategy to address all existing public water systems, including transient noncommunity systems. The capacity development strategy is a guide for the state to help existing systems maintain their technical, managerial, and financial capacity. States were required to submit the strategies to EPA by August 6, 2000.

The strategy emphasizes the importance of the entire public drinking water program in Wisconsin. Capacity development weaves together all of the existing drinking water program activities into a focused effort to help troubled systems. A fact sheet, which describes the strategy, is posted on DNR's web site at

**[dnr.wi.gov/gov/water/dwg/CapDev/StrategyFactSheet.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/gov/water/dwg/CapDev/StrategyFactSheet.pdf)**

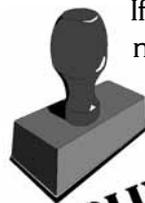
The Capacity Development Program strives to help existing water systems improve operations and, most importantly, maintain a safe drinking water supply. By prioritizing systems that are most in need, the state will be able to effectively target technical and financial assistance.

Capacity evaluation forms for NTNC and OTM systems may be obtained from the DNR at no charge by writing to: Bureau of Drinking Water and Groundwater, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921, or by calling (608) 264-9229 or on the web **[dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/CapDev/CapDevIndex.htm](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/CapDev/CapDevIndex.htm)**

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### Incomplete Information

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If the information submitted on the capacity evaluation form is incomplete, the form will be returned to the applicant, requesting the missing information within 30 days. Failure to return the completed form could result in enforcement action by the DNR.

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## Where Can I Learn More?

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- To request more information or to submit written comments, please write to:

**Capacity Development Coordinator**

Wisconsin DNR, DG/5  
Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921

- Or, contact the Capacity Development Coordinator by calling (608) 264-9229.

- Also, check out DNR's drinking water web site:

**[dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/)**



- Companion brochures: A financial capacity guide and a handbook pertaining to owner/operator responsibilities are available from the DNR to assist system owners. To receive a copy of these brochures, please call (608) 264-9229.

This publication is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc) upon request. Please call the Capacity Development Coordinator at (608) 264-9229 for more information.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to: Equal Opportunity Office, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Bureau of Drinking Water and Groundwater

PUB-DG-058 2008

