The Importance of Laboratory Support in the Implementation of Water Safety Plans

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Water Safety Plans

• Ensure the availability of safe drinking water to consumers by:

  • Minimizing the contamination of source waters;

  • The reduction or removal of contaminants through treatment processes;

  • The prevention of contamination during storage, distribution and handling of the treated drinking water.
Water Safety Plans

• Elements:
  • Describe the Water System
  • Identify Hazards and Hazardous Events
  • Determine and Validate Control Measures
  • Develop Improvement Plan
  • Develop Monitoring Plan for Control Measures
  • Verify Effectiveness of WSP

*Underlying assumption: good quality laboratory support.*
US EPA Drinking Water Laboratory Certification Program

• For any US laboratory testing water samples for compliance to drinking water regulations.

• Pass annual Performance Testing Samples

• Pass initial on-site audit, verifying compliance to Critical Elements

• Pass on-site audit every 3 years
Laboratory Support - Critical Elements

• Personnel
  • Education qualifications
  • Performance testing

• Laboratory Facilities
  • Well maintained, clean
  • Controlled space and climate
  • Presence of required safety hoods
  • Proper waste disposal facilities

• Laboratory Equipment and Supplies
  • Necessary for approved methods

• General Laboratory Practices
  • Use of reagent-grade chemicals and water
  • Glassware cleaning and preparation
Laboratory Support - Critical Elements

• Analytical Methodology
  • Use of approved methods

• Sample Collection, Handling and Preservation
  • Proper containers
  • Proper preservation
  • Holding times
  • Collection procedures

• Quality Assurance and Control
  • Proper standards (weights, thermometers, color standards)

• Records and Data Reporting
  • Maintenance of sampling records
  • Maintenance of analytical records
Laboratory Support-
Water Safety Plan Implementation

- WSP Element: Water System Description
  - System-specific flow charts enable identification of hazards
- Lab staff have a role in choosing sampling sites and frequency of sampling.
  - Sampling sites in distribution system should be representative of how water flows and the location of potential contamination sites.
  - Generally, only the number of samples that can be analyzed that same day should be collected.
Importance of Sampling Locations

- 24 inch water main
  - Low water age
  - Highest quality water

- 6 inch water pipe
  - High water age
  - Lowest water quality
Laboratory Support-
Water Safety Plan Implementation

• WSP element: Understanding the Hazards and Threats
  • *Situations or events that could lead to the presence of a chemical or microbiological hazard.*
  • Lack of proper treatment (catastrophic consequences)
  • Water pipe repair
  • Insufficient chlorination
  • Animal feces in storage reservoirs
  • Wastewater/industrial water cross-connections
  • Example- if Hazardous Event is inadequate chemical disinfectant dosing, Treatment plant lab staff will need to carefully calibrate and maintain chlorine meters.
  • Example- if Hazardous Event is a heavy rain storm in the watershed that supplies source waters, Laboratory Staff will need sensitive/accurate methods to monitor nutrient levels in order to predict harmful algal blooms.
Laboratory Support - Water Safety Plan Implementation

• WSP element: Control Measures and Priorities
  • Actions and activities that prevent or minimize hazard occurrence.

• Examples:
  • Watershed protection
    • Control of human waste/agricultural waste inputs
  • Water Treatment
    • Coagulation/flocculation
    • Filter maintenance
    • Disinfectant dosing
  • Piped Distribution System
    • Power supply backup
    • Cross-connection control
    • Integrity of storage facilities
    • Disinfectant residual
Laboratory Support - Water Safety Plan Implementation

• Control Measures and Priorities
  • Coagulation/flocculation- reduces organic and pathogen loads
    • Jar tests- critical for determining ideal coagulants
  • pH- critical parameter
  • Audit checklist for pH measurements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are meter scale graduations within 0.1 units?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are pH buffer aliquots used only once?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are electrodes maintained properly?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are pH meters standardized before each use with 2 buffers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are both date of use, buffers used, analyst initials recorded?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is pH slope recorded monthly after calibration?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are pH buffer solutions dated when received/opened?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are pH buffer solutions discarded by expiration date?</td>
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Laboratory Support-
Water Safety Plan Implementation

• Control Measures and Priorities- actions and activities that prevent or minimize hazard occurrence.
  • Piped Distribution System
    • Disinfectant residual
    • Method used is important
Laboratory Support - Water Safety Plan Implementation

- Control Measures and Priorities - actions and activities that prevent or minimize hazard occurrence.
  - Piped Distribution System
    - Disinfectant residual
    - Method used is important

- Pool test kits - othotolidine based; only tests for total chlorine

- Color wheel test kits - DPD based; more accurate if used correctly

- Digital meters - DPD based; most accurate; standards available
Laboratory Support - Water Safety Plan Implementation

• Control Measures and Priorities - actions and activities that prevent or minimize hazard occurrence.
  • Piped Distribution System
    • Disinfectant residual
    • Method used is important

• Protocol is important:
  • Is test performed in the field at the sampling site?
  • Is the proper reagent used - total vs free chlorine?
  • Is the blank used correctly?
  • Are the tubes clean before use?
• WSP Element: Limits and Monitoring
  • Setting/Monitoring of operational limits assess whether control measures are functioning.
  • Watershed protection
    • Rainfall, turbidity, heavy metals, algal blooms
    • Example: Pumping rate consistent, indicating water intake functioning
  • Water treatment processes
    • Turbidity, pH, chemical dosage, flow rate
    • Example: no Cl- concentration of zero for >10 minutes
  • Distribution system
    • Turbidity, pH, disinfectant, hydraulic pressure
    • Example: workers trained in proper pipe repair

• Monitoring plan needed
Laboratory Support-
Water Safety Plan Implementation

- WSP Element: Validation and Verification
  - Establish that WSP is working as intended, i.e. to produce safe drinking water.
  - Treatment plant operates to remove chemical and microbiological contaminants.
    - Algal toxins, pathogens (bacterial, viral, protozoan)
  - Distribution system water quality is preserved.
    - Absence of *E. coli*
Laboratory Support-
Water Safety Plan Implementation

• **WSP Element: Validation and Verification**
  - *Establish that WSP is working as intended, i.e to produce safe drinking water.*
  - Distribution system water quality is preserved.
    - **Absence of E. coli**
    - Examples of QA/QC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are thermometers calibrated annually against a traceable reference thermometer?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do incubator units maintain temperature specified by methods, 35°C +/- 0.5°C and 44.5°C +/- 0.2°C?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are spore strips or ampules used monthly to confirm autoclave sterilization?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the final pH of bacteriological medium checked and recorded?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is bacteriological medium autoclaved at 121°C for 12-15 minutes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is water level in water bath above the upper level of medium in culture tubes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is prepared medium stored in the dark and discarded after an appropriate time period?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was disinfectant neutralizer present in sample bottle prior to sampling?</td>
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</table>
Summary

• Implementation of a Water Safety Plan can help ensure utilities produce and maintain excellent water quality from source to tap.

• Successful implementation will require excellent laboratory support.
Thanks for your attention

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