

Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division

SURFACE WATER SOURCE PROTECTION AREAS

Public water systems are required to develop Source Protection Areas (SPAs) and plans to protect their drinking water sources. A **Surface Water SPA** is the watershed area contributing surface water and groundwater flow to the drinking water intake. Most Surface Water SPAs are divided into Zones 1, 2, and 3. These zones are developed to help water systems prioritize source protection efforts. The following is a description of the three zones:

Zone 1 is an area immediately around the drinking water withdrawal site. This is the area where impacts from contamination are likely to be immediate and certain. For public community water systems, this area is generally 200 feet around the intake.

Zone 2 consists of areas within the watershed located within 200 feet of perennial surface water. Zone 2 is limited to a maximum extent of 17,000 acres. Land uses occurring within this zone are considered to have a greater potential to impact the source than the majority of the watershed.

Zone 3 consists of the remaining watershed area outside Zones 1 and 2 where land uses have potential to impact drinking water quantity and quality.

The public water system develops a Source Protection Plan based on the approved SPA. Implementing the plan generally involves cooperation with landowners within the SPA to help protect local stream corridors from contamination. The water system does not have authority to control land uses on any land within the SPA unless they own the land or have specific legal agreements with the landowner. Some towns have local ordinances with overlay districts that correspond with the SPAs for public water supply sources.

If you own land or live within a SPA, protecting surface water and groundwater on your property takes on extra importance. This is because everything you spill on the land or in a stream or dump down your septic system may ultimately come out of someone's drinking water tap. Examples of things you can do to protect drinking water supplies are not disposing of hazardous wastes, such as oil, pesticides, and fertilizers, on your property and routinely pumping out your septic tank.

Some state rules, such as those administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation's Drinking Water & Groundwater Protection and Waste Management Divisions, may restrict activities within SPAs. For example, new landfills and sludge disposal sites are prohibited within Zone 1 and 2 of Surface Water SPAs. The Agency of Agriculture considers public drinking water source protection in its pesticide application permits. Public drinking water source protection is also factored into Act 250 and Section 248 decisions.

Public drinking water source protection areas are also used for decisions about how to manage state and federally-owned lands and how to respond to natural and human-made disasters. For example, public drinking water source protection areas are considered during the development of forest management plans and state-wide emergency response plans.

This fact sheet and related environmental information are available electronically at:
www.dec.vermont.gov/water

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