

Drinking Water

Ontario’s drinking water standards are changing

By Ivana Strgacic

In 2002, Ontario’s *Safe Drinking Water Act* was created as a result of the tragedy in Walkerton. All municipal drinking water systems had to implement a quality management system (QMS) that met the Drinking Water Quality Management System (DWQMS) standard. The purpose was to expand the focus of municipal drinking water providers from just compliance.

The DWQMS standard was published in October 2006. All licensed drinking water systems serving populations over 100 have now been accredited. Traditional verification of compliance to drinking water standards is usually just a snap shot in time. This becomes a reactive process, acting only when you are out of compliance. A QMS which meets the requirements of the DWQMS, for-

es a drinking water system to ensure that compliance is consistently achieved. As a result of experiences of municipalities and accreditation bodies, the standard has been revised. Proposed revisions of the DWQMS standard were published for comment in June 2013.

Overview

A number of the proposed changes

Table 1. Proposed updates to the DWQMS standard.

Element	Proposed Revision
2 – Quality Management System Policy	Removal of the requirement that the policy has to be “appropriate to the subject system,” and a clarification of language related to communication.
6 – Drinking Water System	A lot of changes to the expectations of what needs to be documented with respect to the description of the drinking water system.
7 – Risk Assessment	Consistency of language regarding the frequency that the risk assessment has to be done. From “once a year” to “once every calendar year.”
12 – Communication	Specifying that communication is only required to essential suppliers and not all suppliers.
14 – Infrastructure Review	Consistency of language with respect to the frequency of activities.
16 – Sampling, Testing and Monitoring	Added flexibility with respect to sampling and testing up stream water.
19 – Internal Audits	Consistency of language with respect to the frequency of activities.
20 – Management Review	Consistency of language with respect to the frequency of activities.
21 – Continual Improvement	Major change. Previously there was only the requirement to take corrective action in order to continually improve. The proposed revision will require a systemic process on how to handle corrective actions effectively to ensure continual improvement.
18 – Emergency Management	There are no proposed changes to the requirements. However, there is additional information with respect to training and testing within the guidance document, which has been a source of confusion for many.

were administrative, to make the language consistent. For example, “once every 12 months” and “once a year” are being replaced with “once every calendar year.” These changes are small, but can be easily missed by management system coordinators, when making updates to their documentation.

There were also a number of updates proposed to the guidance document, providing improved and increased guidance for the implementation of different elements. Only nine of the 21 elements had any changes proposed, with the majority of the changes being language (Table 1).

The biggest proposed change to the DWQMS is the inclusion of a planning section for Continual Improvement, Element 21. This includes three key points:

1. Consideration of best management practices at least once every 36 months. This appears to be the start of an objective setting activity typically seen in other management systems. This is something that is usually considered during Ministry inspections.

2. Defining and documenting a process for the identification and management of corrective actions. Previously, corrective actions were only required to be taken as a result of internal audits. But, nonconformities requiring corrective action can come from many different sources.

3. Defining and documenting a process for the identification and management of preventive actions. This is a new requirement for this standard. Preventive actions are just as essential to continual improvement as corrective actions. These are actions that prevent incidents and nonconformities from happening.

Whatever the time frame may be for implementation, all quality management systems will benefit greatly from implementing the proposed changes to Element 21. Corrective actions and continual improvement ensure that problems do not repeat themselves. Operators can spend their time maintaining a healthy system instead of constantly applying the same band-aids over and over again.

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