

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Assessing the effectiveness of Washington's water-use efficiency regulations

Around the globe, rapid population growth and warmer temperatures from changing climate are putting pressure on the availability of fresh water. As is the case in other parts of the United States, the Pacific Northwest is also experiencing more frequent drought conditions. Proactively managing and conserving precious water resources are fast becoming essential responsibilities of the state.

In Washington, the Department of Health (DOH) regulates around 17,700 water systems for quality and safety, ensuring they provide fresh, drinkable water to the state's residents. Most drinkable water is distributed to Washingtonians by a subset of the water systems, called municipal water suppliers. They are differentiated in state law based on their customer size or if they serve a governmental purpose. Examples of municipal water suppliers include some cities, public water districts, water associations and mobile home parks. More than 6.5 million Washingtonians currently get their water from around 2,100 municipal water suppliers.

In 2003, the Legislature passed a law applicable specifically to municipal water suppliers, the Municipal Water Law, to help ensure the efficient supply and use of water. The law requires DOH to develop conservation planning requirements and distribution system leakage standards, and to establish performance requirements for both. These regulations are set out in WAC 246-290-800.

Preliminary scope and objectives

The audit will examine how DOH monitors municipal water suppliers and ensures they follow the Municipal Water Law, and to what extent suppliers are doing so. Where they do not, the audit will seek to understand the reasons suppliers are unable to comply. The audit will also look at successful practices in other states to identify any that Washington's water suppliers may want to consider to improve their water use efficiency. The audit will seek to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do Washington's municipal water suppliers comply with water use efficiency requirements?
- What opportunities exist for the Department of Health and municipal water suppliers to help improve water use efficiency in Washington?



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