

Frequently Asked Questions - Source Water Assessments

1. **Q.** What is a source water susceptibility assessment (SWSA)?

A. The source water susceptibility assessments are reports of the susceptibility of public water systems to 227 drinking water contaminants. The results include a rating of High, Medium or Low for each of the contaminants.
2. **Q.** Why did the TCEQ do this work?

A. The assessment reports were federally mandated under the Safe Drinking Water Act.
3. **Q.** How is a public water supply (PWS) system's susceptibility determined?

A. Susceptibility is determined through the use of geographic information system (GIS) software. Assessments are based on six major assessment components:

 1. Identification of the source of water,
 - 2) Delineation of the area contributing water to the source,
 - 3) Determination of natural properties which contribute to susceptibility,
 - 4) Evaluation of non-point source contaminants,
 - 5) Evaluation of point source contaminants, and
 - 6) Inclusion of contaminant detections above a TCEQ threshold concentration from water quality monitoring sites
4. **Q.** Why is the report so long?

A. The first 24 pages describe everything that went into the assessments and how they were completed. The appendices and maps at the end of the report are specific to a water system and make up the results of the assessment.
5. **Q.** What does point source contamination mean?

A. These are contaminants that can be traced back to a specific point.
EXAMPLE: Gasoline from an underground storage tank at a gas station.
6. **Q.** What does nonpoint source contamination mean?

A. These are contaminants that can originate from multiple points and cannot be traced back to a specific location.
EXAMPLE: Pesticides draining from suburban lawns after a rain fall.

7. **Q.** Our system received a **HIGH** susceptibility to a contaminant, is there a public health threat?
- A.** **NO.** A **HIGH** susceptibility means there are activities near the source water and the natural conditions of the aquifer or watershed make the source susceptible to this contaminant. If contaminant levels above allowable limits have been detected for your water system, you would receive a separate notification.
8. **Q.** Are some of the contaminants in the assessment related to the treatment process?
- A.** **YES.** Refer to appendix A for contaminants that may be related treatment.
8. **Q.** How should a PWS system use the results of the SWSA for their system?
- A.** The results of the assessments should be used as **GUIDELINES** in implementing protection measures. A summary of the results will be included in the Consumer Confidence Reports (CCR).
9. **Q.** What information should be included in the CCR?
- A.** Reporting requirements of assessment results will be included in the CCR guidance and template to be sent out in spring/summer 2003. As a minimum, all systems will have to report that the assessment is complete and on file with the water system. Note: at no point should the general public have access to detailed location information such as latitude and longitude of wells and intakes. However, general information such as which aquifer or reservoirs are used is required by the CCR.
10. **Q.** The results of the SWSA indicate a water system is “highly susceptible” to certain contaminants. How do I figure out which contaminants?
- A.** Review Appendices E, G and I of the report. Appendix E lists high susceptibility rated contaminants by water source; Appendix G indicates the number and distance of general classes of point sources that are potential sources of contamination; and Appendix I illustrates the proximity of point sources to the water source.

11. **Q.** If the data used in calculating the susceptibility rating of our water system is inaccurate, (inaccurate data may include: locations of intakes or wells, well depth, pump rate, etc.), can the assessment be recalculated?

A. **YES.** Although every effort was made to obtain accurate data prior to assessment, water systems may identify inaccuracies and submit written corrections along with documentation.

Note: Systems will be re-assessed after June 1, 2003

12. **Q.** Our system could not find the well logs for our well. What does that mean?

A. Well log information, along with aquifer information, is used to determine the capture zone for each well. If this information is missing, a ½ mile radius circle is used to represent the capture zone.

13. **Q.** This report shows the presence of potential sources of contamination (PSOC) near my well, but I know they don't exist. What should I do?"

A. Note any discrepancies in the report and provide documentation supporting your position. Discrepancies will be evaluated and the assessment will be performed again using the newly acquired data. Please send all comments and changes in writing.

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14. **Q.** How can I verify the structural integrity of my well? There are no records available from the driller or the previous owner."

A. An engineer or other professional can be hired to perform a down-hole video survey to document the screened interval and a cement bond log to determine the annular cement. This can be done the next time your pump is pulled for servicing.

15. **Q.** How will contaminant susceptibility ratings affect a PWS system?

A. Susceptibility ratings will allow PWS systems to focus source water protection efforts on potential sources of contaminants. The results of the assessments may be used to adjust monitoring schedules and may reduce monitoring costs by identifying contaminants of concern.

You can also use this information to select future well sites that have fewer potential sources of contamination.

16. **Q.** Our system purchases treated water from another public water system. Is this information included in our assessment?
- A.** **NO.** The assessments only use wells or intakes identified during TCEQ inspections as operational, demand, emergency, or test. In some cases a raw water source has been included if it feeds a canal system that a water supply is drawing from.
17. **Q.** Where can I find more information on these contaminants and their effects on water quality standards?
- A.** Visit the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website where you will find information about contaminants and water quality standards. Contact the EPA at the following web address: <http://www.epa.gov> Another helpful website is <http://www.chemfinder.com>
18. **Q.** What is the difference between "source susceptibility" and "system susceptibility"?
- A.** For PWS systems with multiple source waters, the assessment software assesses each individual drinking water source, producing a report for each well or intake. The overall system susceptibility report is an average of all the individual water source assessments.
19. **Q.** Do I have to send copies to all customers?
- A.** **NO.** You should, however, understand the results well enough to explain them to your customers.
20. **Q.** The assessments made use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) incorporating geographical data. Is this data available to the public?
- A.** **YES,** write to the Source Water Assessment and Protection (SWAP) Team and provide the team with blank CD-R disks and the data will be provided to you or let you know who to contact. The request should be mailed to:

TCEQ/ Water Supply Division
Source Water Assessment & Protection
P.O. Box 13087 (MC-155)
Austin, TX. 78711-3087

21. **Q.** How does a water system go about implementing protection measures?
- A.** A water system can enroll in the Source Water Protection (SWP) Program. Guidance explaining requirements of membership in the SWP program is available at:

<http://www.tnrcc.state.tx.us/permitting/waterperm/pdw/swap/swp.html>

You may also write to the above address for more information. Beginning June 1, 2003, we expect to begin working closely with water systems interested in implementing protection measures for their source water.

22. **Q.** I can't understand this report. It's too technical and I don't know what it means.
- A.** Take your time, write down questions you have regarding the report and send them to TCEQ for review. Beginning June 1, 2003, our staff will address any issues you have.