

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 763
Ways and Means

(Howard County Delegation)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Howard County Public Schools - Testing and Inspection of Well Water for Bacteria
Ho. Co. 10-08

This bill requires the Howard County Board of Education to test for bacteria in the water supply of each county public school that is served by well water. The board must post the results of each test on its web site.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: One-time expenditure of \$1,400 by the Howard County Board of Education in FY 2009 to test the water quality in seven county schools served by well water. It is assumed that the county board could satisfy the bill's notification requirement with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: State regulations governing drinking water may not be more stringent than complete interim or revised federal regulations in effect at the time. In accordance with federal regulations that implement the Safe Drinking Water Act, State regulations require quarterly testing for new well water systems, followed by annual testing. After three consecutive years without detection of any contaminant, testing is required only every five or six years.

Background: The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is responsible for primary enforcement of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Among other things, MDE ensures that public water systems meet strict safe drinking water standards. Although MDE regulates public water systems owned and operated by local governments, the local governments are responsible for conducting and paying for water quality testing. However, they must use State certified labs to assess their water samples. Results are then reviewed by MDE for compliance with federal and State water quality standards.

In accordance with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, the State regulates the maximum contaminant levels of approximately 100 contaminants, including specified inorganic chemicals, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), synthetic organic compounds, radioactive materials, and microbiological contaminants (including bacteria). It also regulates the level of lead, copper, and turbidity in drinking water.

MDE reports that Howard County has seven public schools served by well water, and that the schools routinely test for bacteria and other contaminants regulated by the Safe Water Drinking Act. In the past 10 years, only one of the seven schools has had a coliform bacteria violation, which occurred in August 2007. MDE responded by requiring public notification and collection of additional samples. It also recommended disinfection of the wells and flushing of water mains to clear the system of remaining bacterial traces.

Local Expenditures: MDE estimates the cost of a water quality test to be between \$150 and \$200, so the total cost of the required tests would be, at most, \$1,400.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 25, 2008
mll/mwc

Analysis by: Michael C. Rubenstein

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510

