

COMMISSIONERS

Keith E. Bell, Chair
Howard A. Denis, Vice Chair
Fausto R. Bayonet
T. Eloise Foster
Chris Lawson

GENERAL MANAGER

Carla A. Reid



February 9, 2022

The Honorable Kumar Barve and
Members of the House Environment
and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information HB 371 – Environment – Salt Applicator Certification Program – Establishment

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC Water) is the largest water and wastewater utility in Maryland, with nearly 5,844 miles of freshwater pipeline and over 5,610 miles of sewer pipeline. Our service area spans nearly 1,000 square miles in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, and we serve 1.9 million residents through approximately 475,000 customer accounts.

HB 371 Environment – Salt Applicator Certification Program – Establishment requires that the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) establish a "Salt Applicator Certification Program". Commercial applicators are defined as individuals that apply salt or salt alternatives or supervise those that apply salt or salt alternatives. These individuals are required to be certified by October 1, 2024. Commercial applicators include private business owners and property managers but not state or local government employees.

When salt is used to treat roads, parking lots and sidewalks during winter events, it "runs off" into storm drains, local streams, and eventually into the Potomac and Patuxent rivers. These types of salt treatments have increased the chloride levels in WSSC Water's source water over the past 30 years. The average yearly chloride levels in the Potomac River and Patuxent River Reservoir have increased 231% and 300%, respectively.

Because chloride cannot be removed during the filtration process, these increased levels impact our infrastructure by attacking and weakening metallic piping due to corrosion. This weakening of our system can lead to more water main leaks and breaks. Additionally, high levels of chloride can give a salty taste to the drinking water, damage household appliances, boilers, and, if the water is being used for irrigation, it may inhibit the growth of vegetation.

The Honorable Kumar Barve and
Members of the House Environment
and Transportation Committee
February 9, 2022
Page 2 of 2

High levels of chloride also contribute to an increase in the presence of manganese, a non-harmful mineral the by-product created by chloride's erosion of minerals in soil, which then enters the water system through snowmelt runoff. In March 2015, chloride levels in our source water reached a record high; at this time, there was an increase in snow events and the State Highway Administration reported an unusually high amount of salt use in treating roads, resulting in an increase in manganese in the Potomac River. This resulted in increased, long-term discolored water problems, with customers reporting over 5,300 discolored water complaints from March to October 2015. By comparison, WSSC Water has received an average of 2,200 discolored water complaints during those same months over the past 10 years.

Additional treatment measures had to be put into place to remove the manganese at the plant, and WSSC Water increased flushing of the water distribution system to address the discolored water. The cost of these treatment measures was over \$780,000.

The current observed sodium levels in WSSC Water's source water is not a health concern for the general public. WSSC Water monitors the level of sodium weekly and reports these results to MDE on a monthly basis. The yearly averages and ranges at the Patuxent and Potomac filtration plants are published in our annual *Water Quality Report*. Additionally, WSSC Water provides same-day notifications to hospitals and dialysis centers in our service area when sodium levels spike in the source water. We are currently working with Prince George's County and Montgomery County health departments to expand our notification and data sharing processes.

The efficient use of road salts will curtail the amount of manganese being released into the source water, and not require additional costs to treat increased levels of manganese at the treatment plant. Furthermore, lower chloride levels in the Potomac and Patuxent rivers will slow the deterioration of the drinking water distribution system. Unexpected increases of minerals and compounds entering WSSC Water's source water results in the need to spend additional funds not budgeted for treatment. These additional costs are borne by all WSSC Water ratepayers.

WSSC Water encourages the State to continue to take measures to reduce the amounts of chloride entering drinking water sources after winter weather events. If you have any questions, please contact me at 240-564-5236 or monica.marquina@wsscwater.com.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



8290DD84F4A04D0
Monica C. Marquina

Government Affairs Manager