



Water Equity in Rural Virginia Workgroup
Thursday, December 17th, 2020 | 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

MINUTES

Attending:

Emily Kate Bowen (Mountain Empire Community College); Nelson Daniel (Office of Drinking Water); Emily Keenum (Virginia Early Childhood Foundation); Leigh Anne Krometis (Virginia Tech, Biological Systems Engineering Department); Beth Leftwich (Virginia Department of Social Services); Erin Ling (Virginia Tech, Virginia Household Water Quality Program); Brenna Robinson (UVA Cancer Center); Danny Saggese (Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth); Scott Vogel (Office of Drinking Water)

Staff: Sarah Holland, Erica Facetti, Chloe Van Zandt
Meeting recording [link](#)

Proceedings:

Desired Outcomes

- Understanding of resources and research that affect our mission
- A shared understanding of groups focus on rural areas
- Built consensus on workgroup's next steps

Discussion

Mission Statement

- Full consensus in support of the mission statement as is
- Mission statement: *To better understand water use/avoidance through research that identifies water coping behaviors in rural Virginia communities, by looking at the implications of drinking water quality and public perceptions of water quality.*
- Unanimous support of the mission statement.

What does rural mean?

- RUCA codes: not urban, or not close to urban
- Low population for geography
- The tendency for private sewage, well water and springs, off the grid
- Reduced infrastructure generally
- Lower resource, low internet/web connectivity
- Challenges of distance and topography, more spread out
- Low population density; small, dispersed communities
- Typically conservative and less trusting of government
- Does USDA and Social Services use the same definition? Uncertain, probably not
- Are we going to define rural for the group? If you use RUCA codes would categorize most places but may leave out some places that are understood as rural. No income considerations in rural definition.
- Rural for the purpose of this group will use the definition as it applies to water designations. Defined as anyone served by a private water system, and people served by municipal systems served by very small and small utilities. Some systems are large but served dispersed people
- From the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations: "small water system" means a water system that serves 3,300 persons or fewer.



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Review Resources (*see presentation*)

- A Burgeoning Crisis? A Nationwide Assessment of the Geography of Water Affordability in the United States
 - o Shows trend low-income populations are the most likely to suffer from unaffordable water costs, which continue to rise
 - o People are starting to think that going from public to private wells is a cheaper solution, but brings new challenges and considerations, there's no state funding for wells
- Examining differences in the implementation of school water-quality practices and water-access policies by school demographic characteristics
 - o Mark Edwards: VT professor, civil engineering; uncovered lead issue in DC in the early 2000s, and researched lead in Flint, MI
 - o There are a lot of resources around water promotion, it's a lot more challenging to see what school staff can do about drinking water
- 2020 General Assembly Bills
 - o History, in 2017: required schools to test for lead in drinking water
 - o In 2020: 2 bills that amended, added reporting requirements and requirements to notify parents. Schools will test for lead and copper in drinking water. Inferred but not required to correct, no timeline or repetition specified. No funding attached. EPA and Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation Act, grant funds for states, VA got \$1.1 million to support lead testing in schools. Will prioritize rural, underserved, and at-risk communities, and schools built before 1986. Schools apply to ODW for funding. ODW will contract a lab to do testing. Schools will follow EPA's 3T's guidance for testing. Additional grant funds, \$1.3 million to support remediation. Working with DOE and DSS to get the word out.
 - o There are 6,000 child day programs. Schools have a centralized resource of school boards. Child day programs don't have the same support system. \$195,000 to build a database to track child day program plans and ODW reviews plans. Each school board will submit testing plans to ODW.
 - o EPA is currently revising the lead and copper rule that will change lead testing for schools and child day programs. EPA has not yet released the rule, the timeline is uncertain. Will have implications for testing, monitoring, and tracking for lead in systems. Will have significant implications on testing and tracking across the nation.
 - o ODW is delayed in testing because so many schools are not in use currently due to the pandemic. Starting testing in 2021.
 - o Remediation options: replace plumbing, treat the water, or provide bottled water (all expensive). Some schools have sent letters home to parents informing them that drinking water is unsafe. ODW has \$1.1 million for testing and \$1.3 million for remediation. Lead tests are 30\$, if a school has multiple sinks and drinking fountains, testing is expensive and adds up. Must test each outlet twice, first draw, and after flushing the pipes. Tony Singh at VDH is in conversation with Virginia Tech about more affordable testing.

Discussion

- Is there a forum for best practices between schools, regarding remediation priorities and how to communicate?
- There is a group in VA, School Building Maintenance Personal, annual meetings, the best group to contact for how to manage this testing/remediation. Local health departments are important

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resources for remediation. VA Beach did testing over the summer last year, found high levels of lead, partnered with the local health department to address the challenges and communicate.

- Is there potential for this group to convene a forum (include additional experts, ex: Mark Edwards) regarding testing in schools? Could have Q&A, brainstorm, what are the issues, what the range of problems is? How to make consistent recommendations. What do the tests mean and what do we do about it, with clear and informed communication, is a challenging piece. Convene forum and partner with schools.
- Include the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services, child day programs are harder to reach.
- VT Extension has partners with child day programs, extension agents do programming here
- PTA Associations, and they also have funding. Can educate if lead letters are sent to parents, how to navigate and communicate.
- VDSS Subsidy Division which oversees child care subsidy vendors, Head Start Association, State Collaboration Office, and Smart Beginnings Childhood initiatives
- Are public schools and daycares two different conversations? Or is it the same target audience?
- Child care Development Fund, quality and subsidy monies, used to be DSS and is now DOE. A lot of headstart programs are part of school programs. Starting with Education allows you to reach a broad and diverse audience.
- Opportunity for the group: identify and convene experts for forum
- VDH jurisdiction: If the school is not operating a water work, there's no ODW authority. This group could help with
- VDH- ODW private water office inspects schools and daycares annually, there is opportunity to partner with local Environmental Health Specialists.
- Daycare with lead levels too high- VDH has lead-safe program, partly ODW and in the office of Epidemiology

Review Resources (*see presentation*)

- Small town, big challenges: Does rurality influence Safe Drink Water Act compliance?
 - o Small waterworks are more likely to have monitoring and reporting violations
- Rev Your Bev
 - o (new report will be shared)
 - o Helpful to see data on how students in schools feel about their water

Action Items

- Next meeting: Thursday, Jan 28 10:00-11:00 a.m.
- Nelson will see if there are other VDH partners to join this group
- Erin, Chloe, and Ericca will look more into the possibility of a water testing best practices for remediation forum and share with the group

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.