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AWWA Policy: Recreational Use of Domestic Water Supply Reservoirs

October 10, 2016

The following revised AWWA Policy Statement on Recreational Use of Domestic Water Supply Reservoirs has been approved by the Technical and Educational Council for member comment.

Comments on the policy statement will be reviewed by AWWA staff and forwarded to the Executive Committee if the comments are minor or referred back to the originating body if the comments are substantive. Policies forwarded to the Executive Committee will be reviewed and, if approved, forwarded to the Board of Directors for final action.

Recreational Use of Domestic Water Supply Reservoirs

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) supports the principle that water of the highest quality should be used as the source of supply for public water systems. Accordingly, the risks and potential mitigation requirements of any recreational activity on water supply reservoirs should be identified and publicly evaluated. In the evaluation, utility-, customer- and other stakeholder-determined acceptable levels of risk should be given the highest consideration. No recreation should be permitted on finished-water reservoirs under any circumstances.

Protection of public health and drinking water quality should be the highest priority in operational decisions for reservoirs used jointly for water supply and recreation. Decisions regarding recreational use of domestic water supply reservoirs should be consistent with the intent of the source water protection program developed and implemented by the utilities and other responsible parties.

Recreational uses of domestic water supply reservoirs and the land-based infrastructure necessary to support such uses can add sources of microbial, physical, and chemical contaminants to the drinking water produced from the reservoirs. Water utility decisions on permitting recreational uses of water supply reservoirs should consider the following issues: (1) the potential for water quality degradation, (2) the public health risk, (3) the acceptance of such health risk by the customers, (4) the current required level of treatment, and (5) additional treatment requirements, uncertainties, and costs that may be incurred. Recreational uses should be prohibited in those instances where a scientifically-based risk assessment, or, in the absence of a risk assessment, the best available scientific data demonstrates a probable or imminent degradation of water quality or hazard to public health that cannot be controlled or mitigated in a cost effective manner.

When considering proposals for recreational use of domestic water supply reservoirs, the water utility should work with stakeholders to develop an integrated reservoir management plan, including appropriate water quality monitoring, to evaluate and, if necessary, mitigate water quality impacts, and to minimize increased risks. Body-contact recreation (e.g., swimming, water skiing, wind surfing) and use of two-cycle gasoline engines on boats should be discouraged or prohibited. In addition, boat inspection/washing stations and restrictive use of live bait should be considered to prevent the introduction of foreign and invasive species (such as zebra mussels or non-native algal species) that could potentially destabilize a reservoir's ecology and water quality. Where feasible, costs for monitoring, evaluations, and mitigation should be borne by those proposing or benefiting from the recreational activity, not by the utility or its customers.

If recreation already exists on a reservoir, the water utility should work or continue to work with stakeholders to develop an integrated reservoir management plan and associated implementation actions to mitigate water quality impacts and to minimize increased risks.

Adopted by the Board of Directors June 13, 1971, reaffirmed Jan. 28, 1979, and Jan. 25, 1987, revised June 23, 1996, June 13, 2004, and Jan. 25, 2009. Revision approved June 10, 2012.

Submit comments by November 9, 2016.

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