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IFAS EXTENSION

Handbook of Florida Water Regulation: Safe Drinking Water Act¹

Michael T. Olexa, Luke D'Isernia, Laura Minton, Dulcy Miller, and Sarah Corbett²

Preface

This handbook is designed to provide an accurate, current, and authoritative summary of the principle Federal and Florida laws that directly or indirectly relate to agriculture. This handbook should provide a basic overview of the many rights and responsibilities that farmers and farmland owners have under both Federal and Florida laws as well as the appropriate contact information to obtain more detailed information. However, the reader should be aware that because the laws, administrative rulings, and court decisions on which this handbook is based are subject to constant revision, portions of this publication could become outdated at anytime. Several details of cited laws are also left out due to space limitations.

This handbook is distributed with the understanding that the authors are not engaged in rendering legal or other professional advice, and the information contained herein should not be regarded as a substitute for professional advice. This handbook is not all inclusive in providing information to

achieve compliance with the Federal and Florida laws and regulations governing water protection. For these reasons, the use of these materials by any person constitutes an agreement to hold harmless the authors, the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, and the University of Florida for any liability claims, damages, or expenses that may be incurred by any person as a result of reference to or reliance on the information contained in this handbook.

Overview

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was passed in 1974 and has been amended several times to expand both its breadth and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) power to enforce it. The SDWA's primary purpose, which is to stop organic chemicals from entering drinking water systems, is accomplished by doing the following:

- Establishing quality standards for drinking water.

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2. Michael T. Olexa, Professor, Food and Resource Economics Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; Director, Agricultural Law Center, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; and Chair, Agricultural Law Committee of The Florida Bar. Luke D'Isernia, former student (graduated cum laude in 2005), Levin College of Law, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Laura Minton, Attorney, Dean, Mead, Egerton, Bloodworth, Capouano, and Bozarth, Orlando, FL. Dulcy Miller, attorney, Foley and Lardner, LLP, Orlando, FL. Sarah Corbett, Attorney, Florida Second District Court of Appeal, Lakeland, FL.

- Monitoring public water systems.
- Guarding against groundwater contamination from injection wells.

Among the areas of SDWA coverage, the regulation and permitting of injection wells probably has the most direct agricultural implications. Underground injection endangers drinking water sources if such injection results in the presence in underground water of any contaminants that may eventually affect drinking water quality. While injection well usually implies a very deep well, the definition of injection under the SDWA may encompass several types of runoff, including irrigation return flow that enters the groundwater. Regulatory agencies, therefore, regulate the activity of the injection well, not the wells themselves.

Who Enforces the SDWA?

In virtually all states, including Florida, the EPA has given up enforcement of the SDWA and now serves only to supervise the state programs approved to take its place. The 1986 amendments to the SDWA, however, gave the EPA increased authority to step in and enforce the SDWA if the state takes no action within 30 days of receiving notice from the EPA that water quality standards of the SDWA have been violated. The states must also adopt all new and revised national regulations in order to continue to retain primary enforcement powers.

What Does the SDWA Prohibit?

The SDWA prohibits any leakage of contaminants from injection wells into groundwater. Facilities that conduct underground injection are also subject to regulation. Regulations under the SDWA create categories of injection wells with different requirements for each. Some injection wells (e.g., hazardous waste wells) are simply prohibited, while others are subject to various permitting, record keeping, reporting, and testing requirements. Wells are evaluated in classes (from Class I to Class V).

What Are the Penalties?

Violations of underground injection well regulations can result in administrative penalties of

up to \$125,000. Civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per day are also available, along with criminal penalties of up to three-years imprisonment, in lieu or in addition to civil penalties, for willful violations. In all cases, the EPA is required to take action if the states fail to do so.

Source

42 United States Code, Sections 300f to 300j-26

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