



FAQ: Water System Approvals for Small Business Owners

1. What is a water system?

A “water system” supplies water for drinking, cleaning, washing dishes, making food, and for bathrooms. If you have a food business and/or your water supply has more than one connection, you need to provide safe water at all times. And, you need a permit.

2. How long does it take to get approved?

[Approval of your water system](#) may take several months. There are three main steps in approval: *Source Assessment*, *Construction Permit*, and *Operating Permit*.

3. Why do I need a Construction Permit?

A Construction Permit lets you construct or make changes to the water system. Water treatment is also included in this approval. This process can take 60 days depending on:

- The amount of detail provided in the application ([see Step 4](#)), and
- How complex the design is.

Remember that your Construction Permit needs to be approved before construction begins, so start the process as soon as possible.

4. How much will construction cost?

If your water contains or may contain harmful pathogens, chemicals or metals, you need to know how much money it will cost to fix these problems. Water system treatment or upgrades can cost several thousand dollars and up depending on what is needed. Also, there are ongoing maintenance and operating costs that come with keeping water safe to drink.

5. My Source Assessment says my water is “at risk of containing pathogens” but my water sample result was good, why is that?

“Pathogens” are bacteria, protozoa or viruses that can cause disease or even death in an infected individual. Water sample labs do not test for every kind of pathogen. For example, viruses are very difficult to test for. The best way to determine the level of harm in the water is for an Environmental Health Officer to do a *Level 1 Source Assessment*. This assessment looks at water quality changes, flooding, run-off, and agriculture/human activity. If your Environmental Health Officer determines your water is *Ground Water at Risk of Containing Pathogens* you will need to meet treatment levels set out by the Ministry of Health (Treatment Objectives).

6. How do I find a Water Treatment Specialist?

Finding the right person(s) to help you is important. They should have experience with Interior Health’s permitting process and understand the Drinking Water Treatment Objectives. You may be able to find a specialist using an internet search of “Drinking Water Treatment Designer/ or Specialist”, or “Water System Design Engineer”. A specialist can prepare and submit the *Construction Permit Application* along with a treatment design. The treatment design includes a description of how the treatment will work. Submitting a complete application with all required documents will speed up the process for approval. Hiring qualified and well-informed people to install the treatment and distribution systems is very important.

7. My treatment is approved and installed, now what?

The last step in the process is to get a *Permit to Operate* for your water system. With this permit you will be considered a water supplier under the *Drinking Water Protection Act* and required to operate the water system in a way that provides safe and reliable water.