

Total Coliform Bacteria Samples 30 Hour Holding Time

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Total Coliform bacteria samples must be delivered to the lab within 30 hours after sampling. This is a change from what has been previously required. This is an EPA requirement and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has been moving toward this goal in the last several months. Mackenzie

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Hales, MDH Compliance Engineer, has written articles that have appeared in the *Waterline* and the *AWWA Breeze*. The goal is to get the word out that this change is taking place.

Minnesota Rural Water Association staff have been receiving almost weekly lists of systems that are exceeding the 30 hour holding time. We are trying to talk to as many of these systems as possible. It is important that water operation specialists realize this change is happening. By understanding how this issue affects them, they can find a solution and therefore get their samples to the lab within that 30 hour window.

I have visited with many of these systems and have found various reasons why the samples are getting to the lab beyond the 30 hours. The water operation specialist should find out when the mail leaves the local post office. With changes in the postal service, post offices now have limited hours that they are open. Some are only open until noon. Others are only open a couple of hours in the morning. Also, some post offices, where the mail was picked up later in the afternoon, are now picked up earlier in the day. Without knowing this the operation specialist may bring in the bacteria sample in the afternoon and there the sample sits until the next day. When this occurs, it is impossible for the sample to get to the lab in time.

One of the common mistakes that has been made is that the water operation specialist routinely takes the sample right away in the morning. If the sample is taken at 8am and

brought to the post office, and the mail doesn't leave that post office until 5pm, several hours have passed and this could be the reason for the sample being late. Most operation specialists seem to be taking samples as late as they can to prevent this situation.

Some operation specialists of small systems are bringing the samples to a larger city post office. This method seems to work quite well. Almost all the cities having problems with this issue are very small cities, with populations of 1,000 or less (usually much less). Also, the northwestern and southwestern part of the state has the most problems. Here are some options for those systems that exceed the 30 hour holding time:

- 1) Talk to your local post office, find out when the mail leaves, tell them about your issue and see if they have a solution.
- 2) Take the bacteria samples as close as you can to when your post office closes or when the mail leaves that office.
- 3) If your local post office closes early in the day, deliver the sample to a nearby larger city post office.
- 4) Contact a courier service such as UPS, FedEx, Speedy, etc.
- 5) Talk to your neighboring cities and find out how they are getting samples to the lab.
- 6) In the event that is impossible to get samples to your assigned lab, a city may have to contract with another state certified lab that is closer to your city.
- 7) A few operators are driving their samples to the lab, if this is necessary, cities could possibly go together and take turns driving.

Talk to your MDH District Engineer, they may have suggestions. You can contact Mackenzie Hales, MDH Compliance Engineer at 651-201-4668 to discuss your situation.

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