

Sole Source Aquifer (SSA) Program: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: State and local government programs already protect the aquifers, so why do we need to duplicate efforts with EPA's Sole Source Aquifer program?

A: After designation of an SSA, EPA may review projects proposed for the area, and may deny Federal financial assistance for any project that might contaminate the aquifer. In some instances, such projects are subject to State or other Federal requirements protecting ground water, but in other instances they are not, depending on the nature of the project. In enacting SDWA §1424(e), Congress did not include a provision for denial of a petition for designation on the basis that it would result in duplication of existing environmental safeguards

Q: Does designation provide any funding for pollution prevention?

A: At this time there is no Federal funding dedicated specifically to prevent pollution of a sole source aquifer. A Federal agency may, however, include pollution prevention costs in the development of its project(s).

Q: Will SSA designation stop a landfill planned for construction near my property?

A: Under the provisions of the law EPA can only review projects for which there has been an application for Federal financial assistance (including loans, loan guarantees, and grants). The SSA program is not intended to inhibit or stop development of privately financed landfills or other projects that are not Federally financed.

Q: Will EPA review activities at Federal facilities, such as military bases?

A: The SSA program applies to Federal *assistance*, but not to direct Federal actions. Work performed for or by the Federal government is not included among the projects that will be reviewed by EPA.

Q: What is the "Project Review Area"?

A: When an aquifer is designated, EPA identifies a *project review area* that defines the total area where EPA may review and act on projects that have Federal financial assistance. The project review area covers the designated aquifer and might also include the "Streamflow Source Area" which is the surrounding land surface that drains onto the aquifer.

Q: What types of modifications might be required for construction projects occurring in the SSA area?

A: This can cover a wide range of problems and responses. In some cases, additional design features are needed to prevent contact of contaminants with the ground surface. This might include installing low permeability liners or barriers to contain spills or prevent seepage into the ground. Modifications might also include management of storm water runoff, or planned discharge, to route flow away from vulnerable areas.

Q: What types of Federally funded projects will be reviewed if SSA designation occurs?

A: The EPA may evaluate any project in the project review area that is supported by Federal financial assistance. The Agency focuses on those projects that involve hazardous or toxic substances. Projects that pose little threat to the aquifer, such as individual home construction, will not be reviewed. Types of projects commonly reviewed include highway construction, projects involving sewage or animal waste, and assistance for commercial or industrial projects.

Q: Are there other benefits to designation as an SSA?

A: Designation as an SSA is a declaration that the aquifer is a valuable resource justifying special consideration under water management and protection programs that are implemented in the State. Thus, government programs might include special provisions for ground water protection in SSAs. The EPA recommends higher priority for scheduling remediation and protection activities in areas with ground water of higher use and value, including SSAs. Some States have enacted legislation requiring greater protection of ground water in EPA-designated areas.