MEWCO Water Testing Frequently Asked Questions

Why does MEWCO take water samples?

Every Public Water System is required to monitor for the presence of coliform. The specific monitoring requirements for our system are based on the number of customers we serve. A biological pathogen is any organism, such as a bacteria, virus, protozoa, or parasite that causes a disease. Biological pathogens are commonly called “germs.” There are many different possible pathogens. It is not possible to test for every type of pathogen in every water sample, so water systems use indicators instead. To put it briefly, these organisms are good indicators of the potential contamination of a water source. Coliform have been used to evaluate the general quality of water. Testing for coliform is faster and cheaper than testing for specific organisms and pathogens.

How are water samples collected?

One of our field personal visits 20 sample sites per month and draws a sample from a business or home. They are collected at multiple sites throughout the water system. They are then delivered to an independent laboratory for testing.

How many water samples are collected?

We collect 20 water samples a month. We usually collect 10 samples within the first 2 weeks of the month and 10 samples in the last 2 weeks of the month. This number is based on the population “size” of the water system

Where are the water samples collected?

We have 60 routine sites we use every quarter. These sites are businesses and homes that represent the entire water system. We also have 120 additional sites that we may use for water collection.

How often are the water samples collected?

Each month of every year water samples are collected and tested. This equals more than 240 samples per year.

What are total coliforms?

Total coliforms are common in the environment (soil or vegetation) and are generally harmless. If a lab detects only total coliform in drinking water, the source is probably environmental and fecal contamination is unlikely. However, if environmental contamination can enter the system, pathogens could get in too. It is important to find and resolve the source of the contamination.

For more information please view the below links from the Washington State Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water’s website. Here are links for water sampling and coliform information:

http://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/Documents/pubs/331-225.pdf

http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/331-181.pdf