

Position Statement

Ensure Water Quality for Environmental Health

The Issue: Evaluating our water

Collecting and assessing unbiased data about waterways and water systems is paramount to maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Laboratory testing is a reliable source of data that helps determine if our water is clean and safe. This monitoring is important because it can detect levels of emerging contaminants such as pharmaceuticals, endocrine disrupting chemicals and biological waste. These can enter the water from a variety of sources, including natural processes, residential activities and industrial practices. Coupled with aging infrastructure, changes in the environment, limited public awareness and education, and underfunded testing and research, these issues have negative impacts on Iowa's water quality. If unaddressed, they can put Iowans at risk for harm to their health.¹

Background: Providing Testing for Iowans

The State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) supports the evaluation of Iowa's water through fieldwork and laboratory testing. Established by Iowa Code 263.7, Chapter 5, SHL aims to provide scientific services, consultation education and applied research, including investigations "by both laboratory and field work."² By assessing the physical, chemical and biological qualities of waterways and water systems, SHL helps safeguard water for Iowans by identifying vulnerabilities to possible hazards.

SHL partners with other organizations – public and private – to provide testing and produce unbiased data that can be used to assure compliance with state and federal legislation and programs, including the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA); the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); the Clean Water Act; the Safe Drinking Water Act; the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy; and Iowa's Grants to Counties Program.^{1,3}

According to Iowa Code, testing waterways and water systems by a state laboratory is necessary to "ensure long-term availability in terms of quantity and quality to preserve the public health and welfare." Given this commitment to safe and clean water and the mitigation of health risks, it is critical to fund State Hygienic Laboratory programs that are uniquely designated to help prevent contamination, and preserve and protect water sources and water systems in Iowa.

Solutions:

- **Fund environmental testing and reporting:** Allocate adequate funding for the State Hygienic Laboratory to evaluate and respond to common and emerging environmental health threats to water by advancing field assessment, laboratory testing, and data reporting for waterways and water systems.
- **Invest in infrastructure:** Sustain the SHL as a statewide asset to ensure safe, reliable water by investing in workforce development, state-of-the art instrumentation, and equipment for field and laboratory operations.
- **Support data analytics:** Support the development of robust systems for collecting, organizing and distributing water quality data through collaboration among environmental health stakeholders and partners.

1 "Safe and Reliable Drinking Water Position Statement" (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, 2017) <http://www.astho.org/Policy-and-Position-Statements/Safe-and-Reliable-Drinking-Water-Position-Statement/>

2 Iowa Code 263.7, Chapter 5, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/2018/263.7.pdf>

3 "Understanding the Safe Drinking Water Act" (Environmental Protection Agency, 2004) <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-04/documents/epa816f04030.pdf>