

1986—Pub. L. 99-339, §102(d)(2), substituted “Enforcement” for “Failure of State to assure enforcement” in section catchline.

Subsec. (a)(1)(A). Pub. L. 99-339, §102(a), inserted “and such public water system” after “notify the State” in provisions following cl. (ii).

Subsec. (a)(1)(B). Pub. L. 99-339, §102(b)(1), amended subpar. (B) generally, substituting provisions which relate to issuance of an order to public water system to comply with regulations, or commencement of civil action if the State has not commenced appropriate enforcement action for provisions which related to public notice of noncompliance and commencement of civil action by Administrator if State failed to take steps to obtain compliance by public water system.

Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 99-339, §102(b)(2), substituted “the Administrator shall issue an order under subsection (g) of this section requiring the public water system to comply with such regulation or requirement or the Administrator shall commence a civil action under subsection (b) of this section” for “he may commence a civil action under subsection (b) of this section”.

Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 99-339, §102(c), inserted “, with an order issued under subsection (g),” before “or with any schedule” and substituted “there has been a violation” for “there has been a willful violation” and “\$25,000” for “\$5,000”.

Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 99-339, §103, substituted provisions relating to amendment of regulations within fifteen months after June 19, 1986, to provide different types and frequencies of notice based on the differences between violations which are intermittent or continuous, manner and content of notices, notice required to public served by owner or operator of public water system, and civil penalty of \$25,000, for provisions relating to form, manner, and frequency of notice based on three month billing period for water bills, notice required to public served by owner or operator of public water system, and civil penalty of \$5,000.

Subsec. (g). Pub. L. 99-339, §102(d), added subsec. (g).  
1977—Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 95-190 inserted provisions relating to frequency of required notice, and notice respecting contaminant levels, and substituted “issued under this subsection” for “thereunder”.

#### § 300g-4. Variances

**(a) Characteristics of raw water sources; specific treatment technique; notice to Administrator, reasons for variance; compliance, enforcement; approval or revision of schedules and revocation of variances; review of variances and schedules; publication in Federal Register, notice and results of review; notice to State; considerations respecting abuse of discretion in granting variances or failing to prescribe schedules; State corrective action; authority of Administrator in a State without primary enforcement responsibility; alternative treatment techniques**

Notwithstanding any other provision of this part, variances from national primary drinking water regulations may be granted as follows:

(1)(A) A State which has primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems may grant one or more variances from an applicable national primary drinking water regulation to one or more public water systems within its jurisdiction which, because of characteristics of the raw water sources which are reasonably available to the systems, cannot meet the requirements respecting the maximum contaminant levels of such drinking water regulation. A variance may be issued to a system on condition that the system install

the best technology, treatment techniques, or other means, which the Administrator finds are available (taking costs into consideration), and based upon an evaluation satisfactory to the State that indicates that alternative sources of water are not reasonably available to the system. The Administrator shall propose and promulgate his finding of the best available technology, treatment techniques or other means available for each contaminant for purposes of this subsection at the time he proposes and promulgates a maximum contaminant level for each such contaminant. The Administrator's finding of best available technology, treatment techniques or other means for purposes of this subsection may vary depending on the number of persons served by the system or for other physical conditions related to engineering feasibility and costs of compliance with maximum contaminant levels as considered appropriate by the Administrator. Before a State may grant a variance under this subparagraph, the State must find that the variance will not result in an unreasonable risk to health. If a State grants a public water system a variance under this subparagraph, the State shall prescribe at the time the variance is granted, a schedule for—

(i) compliance (including increments of progress) by the public water system with each contaminant level requirement with respect to which the variance was granted, and

(ii) implementation by the public water system of such additional control measures as the State may require for each contaminant, subject to such contaminant level requirement, during the period ending on the date compliance with such requirement is required.

Before a schedule prescribed by a State pursuant to this subparagraph may take effect, the State shall provide notice and opportunity for a public hearing on the schedule. A notice given pursuant to the preceding sentence may cover the prescribing of more than one such schedule and a hearing held pursuant to such notice shall include each of the schedules covered by the notice. A schedule prescribed pursuant to this subparagraph for a public water system granted a variance shall require compliance by the system with each contaminant level requirement with respect to which the variance was granted as expeditiously as practicable (as the State may reasonably determine).

(B) A State which has primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems may grant to one or more public water systems within its jurisdiction one or more variances from any provision of a national primary drinking water regulation which requires the use of a specified treatment technique with respect to a contaminant if the public water system applying for the variance demonstrates to the satisfaction of the State that such treatment technique is not necessary to protect the health of persons because of the nature of the

<sup>1</sup> So in original.

raw water source of such system. A variance granted under this subparagraph shall be conditioned on such monitoring and other requirements as the Administrator may prescribe.

(C) Before a variance proposed to be granted by a State under subparagraph (A) or (B) may take effect, such State shall provide notice and opportunity for public hearing on the proposed variance. A notice given pursuant to the preceding sentence may cover the granting of more than one variance and a hearing held pursuant to such notice shall include each of the variances covered by the notice. The State shall promptly notify the Administrator of all variances granted by it. Such notification shall contain the reason for the variance (and in the case of a variance under subparagraph (A), the basis for the finding required by that subparagraph before the granting of the variance) and documentation of the need for the variance.

(D) Each public water system's variance granted by a State under subparagraph (A) shall be conditioned by the State upon compliance by the public water system with the schedule prescribed by the State pursuant to that subparagraph. The requirements of each schedule prescribed by a State pursuant to that subparagraph shall be enforceable by the State under its laws. Any requirement of a schedule on which a variance granted under that subparagraph is conditioned may be enforced under section 300g-3 of this title as if such requirement was part of a national primary drinking water regulation.

(E) Each schedule prescribed by a State pursuant to subparagraph (A) shall be deemed approved by the Administrator unless the variance for which it was prescribed is revoked by the Administrator under subparagraph (G) or the schedule is revised by the Administrator under such subparagraph.

(F) Not later than 18 months after the effective date of the interim national primary drinking water regulations the Administrator shall complete a comprehensive review of the variances granted under subparagraph (A) (and schedules prescribed pursuant thereto) and under subparagraph (B) by the States during the one-year period beginning on such effective date. The Administrator shall conduct such subsequent reviews of variances and schedules as he deems necessary to carry out the purposes of this subchapter, but each subsequent review shall be completed within each 3-year period following the completion of the first review under this subparagraph. Before conducting any review under this subparagraph, the Administrator shall publish notice of the proposed review in the Federal Register. Such notice shall (i) provide information respecting the location of data and other information respecting the variances to be reviewed (including data and other information concerning new scientific matters bearing on such variances), and (ii) advise of the opportunity to submit comments on the variances reviewed and on the need for continuing them. Upon completion of any such review, the Administrator shall publish in the Federal Reg-

ister the results of his review together with findings responsive to comments submitted in connection with such review.

(G)(i) If the Administrator finds that a State has, in a substantial number of instances, abused its discretion in granting variances under subparagraph (A) or (B) or that in a substantial number of cases the State has failed to prescribe schedules in accordance with subparagraph (A), the Administrator shall notify the State of his findings. In determining if a State has abused its discretion in granting variances in a substantial number of instances, the Administrator shall consider the number of persons who are affected by the variances and if the requirements applicable to the granting of the variances were complied with. A notice under this clause shall—

(I) identify each public water system with respect to which the finding was made,

(II) specify the reasons for the finding, and

(III) as appropriate, propose revocations of specific variances or propose revised schedules or other requirements for specific public water systems granted variances, or both.

(ii) The Administrator shall provide reasonable notice and public hearing on the provisions of each notice given pursuant to clause (i) of this subparagraph. After a hearing on a notice pursuant to such clause, the Administrator shall (I) rescind the finding for which the notice was given and promptly notify the State of such rescission, or (II) promulgate (with such modifications as he deems appropriate) such variance revocations and revised schedules or other requirements proposed in such notice as he deems appropriate. Not later than 180 days after the date a notice is given pursuant to clause (i) of this subparagraph, the Administrator shall complete the hearing on the notice and take the action required by the preceding sentence.

(iii) If a State is notified under clause (i) of this subparagraph of a finding of the Administrator made with respect to a variance granted a public water system within that State or to a schedule or other requirement for a variance and if, before a revocation of such variance or a revision of such schedule or other requirement promulgated by the Administrator takes effect, the State takes corrective action with respect to such variance or schedule or other requirement which the Administrator determines makes his finding inapplicable to such variance or schedule or other requirement, the Administrator shall rescind the application of his finding to that variance or schedule or other requirement. No variance revocation or revised schedule or other requirement may take effect before the expiration of 90 days following the date of the notice in which the revocation or revised schedule or other requirement was proposed.

(2) If a State does not have primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems, the Administrator shall have the same authority to grant variances in such State as the State would have under paragraph (1) if it had primary enforcement responsibility.

(3) The Administrator may grant a variance from any treatment technique requirement of

a national primary drinking water regulation upon a showing by any person that an alternative treatment technique not included in such requirement is at least as efficient in lowering the level of the contaminant with respect to which such requirement was prescribed. A variance under this paragraph shall be conditioned on the use of the alternative treatment technique which is the basis of the variance.

**(b) Enforcement of schedule or other requirement**

Any schedule or other requirement on which a variance granted under paragraph (1)(B) or (2) of subsection (a) is conditioned may be enforced under section 300g-3 of this title as if such schedule or other requirement was part of a national primary drinking water regulation.

**(c) Applications for variances; regulations: reasonable time for acting**

If an application for a variance under subsection (a) is made, the State receiving the application or the Administrator, as the case may be, shall act upon such application within a reasonable period (as determined under regulations prescribed by the Administrator) after the date of its submission.

**(d) "Treatment technique requirement" defined**

For purposes of this section, the term "treatment technique requirement" means a requirement in a national primary drinking water regulation which specifies for a contaminant (in accordance with section 300f(1)(C)(ii) of this title) each treatment technique known to the Administrator which leads to a reduction in the level of such contaminant sufficient to satisfy the requirements of section 300g-1(b) of this title.

**(e) Small system variances**

**(1) In general**

A State exercising primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems under section 300g-2 of this title (or the Administrator in nonprimacy States) may grant a variance under this subsection for compliance with a requirement specifying a maximum contaminant level or treatment technique contained in a national primary drinking water regulation to—

(A) public water systems serving 3,300 or fewer persons; and

(B) with the approval of the Administrator pursuant to paragraph (9), public water systems serving more than 3,300 persons but fewer than 10,000 persons,

if the variance meets each requirement of this subsection.

**(2) Availability of variances**

A public water system may receive a variance pursuant to paragraph (1), if—

(A) the Administrator has identified a variance technology under section 300g-1(b)(15) of this title that is applicable to the size and source water quality conditions of the public water system;

(B) the public water system installs, operates, and maintains, in accordance with guidance or regulations issued by the Ad-

ministrator, such treatment technology, treatment technique, or other means; and

(C) the State in which the system is located determines that the conditions of paragraph (3) are met.

**(3) Conditions for granting variances**

A variance under this subsection shall be available only to a system—

(A) that cannot afford to comply, in accordance with affordability criteria established by the Administrator (or the State in the case of a State that has primary enforcement responsibility under section 300g-2 of this title), with a national primary drinking water regulation, including compliance through—

(i) treatment;

(ii) alternative source of water supply; or

(iii) restructuring or consolidation (unless the Administrator (or the State in the case of a State that has primary enforcement responsibility under section 300g-2 of this title) makes a written determination that restructuring or consolidation is not practicable); and

(B) for which the Administrator (or the State in the case of a State that has primary enforcement responsibility under section 300g-2 of this title) determines that the terms of the variance ensure adequate protection of human health, considering the quality of the source water for the system and the removal efficiencies and expected useful life of the treatment technology required by the variance.

**(4) Compliance schedules**

A variance granted under this subsection shall require compliance with the conditions of the variance not later than 3 years after the date on which the variance is granted, except that the Administrator (or the State in the case of a State that has primary enforcement responsibility under section 300g-2 of this title) may allow up to 2 additional years to comply with a variance technology, secure an alternative source of water, restructure or consolidate if the Administrator (or the State) determines that additional time is necessary for capital improvements, or to allow for financial assistance provided pursuant to section 300j-12 of this title or any other Federal or State program.

**(5) Duration of variances**

The Administrator (or the State in the case of a State that has primary enforcement responsibility under section 300g-2 of this title) shall review each variance granted under this subsection not less often than every 5 years after the compliance date established in the variance to determine whether the system remains eligible for the variance and is conforming to each condition of the variance.

**(6) Ineligibility for variances**

A variance shall not be available under this subsection for—

(A) any maximum contaminant level or treatment technique for a contaminant with respect to which a national primary drink-

ing water regulation was promulgated prior to January 1, 1986; or

(B) a national primary drinking water regulation for a microbial contaminant (including a bacterium, virus, or other organism) or an indicator or treatment technique for a microbial contaminant.

**(7) Regulations and guidance**

**(A) In general**

Not later than 2 years after August 6, 1996, and in consultation with the States, the Administrator shall promulgate regulations for variances to be granted under this subsection. The regulations shall, at a minimum, specify—

(i) procedures to be used by the Administrator or a State to grant or deny variances, including requirements for notifying the Administrator and consumers of the public water system that a variance is proposed to be granted (including information regarding the contaminant and variance) and requirements for a public hearing on the variance before the variance is granted;

(ii) requirements for the installation and proper operation of variance technology that is identified (pursuant to section 300g-1(b)(15) of this title) for small systems and the financial and technical capability to operate the treatment system, including operator training and certification;

(iii) eligibility criteria for a variance for each national primary drinking water regulation, including requirements for the quality of the source water (pursuant to section 300g-1(b)(15)(A) of this title); and

(iv) information requirements for variance applications.

**(B) Affordability criteria**

Not later than 18 months after August 6, 1996, the Administrator, in consultation with the States and the Rural Utilities Service of the Department of Agriculture, shall publish information to assist the States in developing affordability criteria. The affordability criteria shall be reviewed by the States not less often than every 5 years to determine if changes are needed to the criteria.

**(8) Review by the Administrator**

**(A) In general**

The Administrator shall periodically review the program of each State that has primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems under section 300g-2 of this title with respect to variances to determine whether the variances granted by the State comply with the requirements of this subsection. With respect to affordability, the determination of the Administrator shall be limited to whether the variances granted by the State comply with the affordability criteria developed by the State.

**(B) Notice and publication**

If the Administrator determines that variances granted by a State are not in compliance with affordability criteria developed

by the State and the requirements of this subsection, the Administrator shall notify the State in writing of the deficiencies and make public the determination.

**(9) Approval of variances**

A State proposing to grant a variance under this subsection to a public water system serving more than 3,300 and fewer than 10,000 persons shall submit the variance to the Administrator for review and approval prior to the issuance of the variance. The Administrator shall approve the variance if it meets each of the requirements of this subsection. The Administrator shall approve or disapprove the variance within 90 days. If the Administrator disapproves a variance under this paragraph, the Administrator shall notify the State in writing of the reasons for disapproval and the variance may be resubmitted with modifications to address the objections stated by the Administrator.

**(10) Objections to variances**

**(A) By the Administrator**

The Administrator may review and object to any variance proposed to be granted by a State, if the objection is communicated to the State not later than 90 days after the State proposes to grant the variance. If the Administrator objects to the granting of a variance, the Administrator shall notify the State in writing of each basis for the objection and propose a modification to the variance to resolve the concerns of the Administrator. The State shall make the recommended modification or respond in writing to each objection. If the State issues the variance without resolving the concerns of the Administrator, the Administrator may overturn the State decision to grant the variance if the Administrator determines that the State decision does not comply with this subsection.

**(B) Petition by consumers**

Not later than 30 days after a State exercising primary enforcement responsibility for public water systems under section 300g-2 of this title proposes to grant a variance for a public water system, any person served by the system may petition the Administrator to object to the granting of a variance. The Administrator shall respond to the petition and determine whether to object to the variance under subparagraph (A) not later than 60 days after the receipt of the petition.

**(C) Timing**

No variance shall be granted by a State until the later of the following:

(i) 90 days after the State proposes to grant a variance.

(ii) If the Administrator objects to the variance, the date on which the State makes the recommended modifications or responds in writing to each objection.

(July 1, 1944, ch. 373, title XIV, §1415, as added Pub. L. 93-523, §2(a), Dec. 16, 1974, 88 Stat. 1669; amended Pub. L. 99-339, title I, §104, June 19, 1986, 100 Stat. 649; Pub. L. 104-182, title I,

§§102(c)(1), 115, 116, title V, §501(a)(3), Aug. 6, 1996, 110 Stat. 1621, 1641, 1691.)

### Editorial Notes

#### AMENDMENTS

1996—Subsec. (a)(1)(A). Pub. L. 104-182, §501(a)(3), inserted “the” before “time the variance is granted,” in introductory provisions.

Pub. L. 104-182, §115, in second sentence, substituted “be issued to a system on condition that the system install” for “only be issued to a system after the system’s application of” and inserted “, and based upon an evaluation satisfactory to the State that indicates that alternative sources of water are not reasonably available to the system” after “(taking costs into consideration)”.

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 104-182, §102(c)(1), substituted “section 300g-1(b)” for “section 300g-1(b)(3)”.

Subsec. (e). Pub. L. 104-182, §116, added subsec. (e).

1986—Subsec. (a)(1)(A). Pub. L. 99-339, §104(1)-(3), substituted “such drinking water regulation. A variance may only be issued to a system after the system’s application” for “such drinking water regulation despite application”, struck out “generally” after “finds are”, inserted provisions relating to proposal and promulgation by Administrator of a finding on best available technology, treatment techniques or other means available for each contaminant at time of proposal and promulgation of maximum contaminant levels, and substituted “at the time” for “within one year of the date”.

Subsec. (a)(1)(A)(ii). Pub. L. 99-339, §104(4), substituted “water system of such additional control” for “water system of such control”.

### § 300g-5. Exemptions

#### (a) Requisite findings

A State which has primary enforcement responsibility may exempt any public water system within the State’s jurisdiction from any requirement respecting a maximum contaminant level or any treatment technique requirement, or from both, of an applicable national primary drinking water regulation upon a finding that—

(1) due to compelling factors (which may include economic factors, including qualification of the public water system as a system serving a disadvantaged community pursuant to section 300j-12(d) of this title), the public water system is unable to comply with such contaminant level or treatment technique requirement, or to implement measures to develop an alternative source of water supply,

(2) the public water system was in operation on the effective date of such contaminant level or treatment technique requirement, or, for a system that was not in operation by that date, only if no reasonable alternative source of drinking water is available to such new system,

(3) the granting of the exemption will not result in an unreasonable risk to health;<sup>1</sup> and

(4) management or restructuring changes (or both) cannot reasonably be made that will result in compliance with this subchapter or, if compliance cannot be achieved, improve the quality of the drinking water.

<sup>1</sup> So in original. The semicolon probably should be a comma.

#### (b) Compliance schedule and implementation of control measures; notice and hearing; dates for compliance with schedule; compliance, enforcement; approval or revision of schedules and revocation of exemptions

(1) If a State grants a public water system an exemption under subsection (a), the State shall prescribe, at the time the exemption is granted, a schedule for—

(A) compliance (including increments of progress or measures to develop an alternative source of water supply) by the public water system with each contaminant level requirement or treatment technique requirement with respect to which the exemption was granted, and

(B) implementation by the public water system of such control measures as the State may require for each contaminant, subject to such contaminant level requirement or treatment technique requirement, during the period ending on the date compliance with such requirement is required.

Before a schedule prescribed by a State pursuant to this subsection may take effect, the State shall provide notice and opportunity for a public hearing on the schedule. A notice given pursuant to the preceding sentence may cover the prescribing of more than one such schedule and a hearing held pursuant to such notice shall include each of the schedules covered by the notice.

(2)(A) A schedule prescribed pursuant to this subsection for a public water system granted an exemption under subsection (a) shall require compliance by the system with each contaminant level and treatment technique requirement with respect to which the exemption was granted as expeditiously as practicable (as the State may reasonably determine) but not later than 3 years after the otherwise applicable compliance date established in section 300g-1(b)(10) of this title.

(B) No exemption shall be granted unless the public water system establishes that—

(i) the system cannot meet the standard without capital improvements which cannot be completed prior to the date established pursuant to section 300g-1(b)(10) of this title;

(ii) in the case of a system which needs financial assistance for the necessary improvements, the system has entered into an agreement to obtain such financial assistance or assistance pursuant to section 300j-12 of this title, or any other Federal or State program is reasonably likely to be available within the period of the exemption; or

(iii) the system has entered into an enforceable agreement to become a part of a regional public water system; and

the system is taking all practicable steps to meet the standard.

(C) In the case of a system which does not serve more than a population of 3,300 and which needs financial assistance for the necessary improvements, an exemption granted under clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (B) may be renewed for one or more additional 2-year periods, but not to exceed a total of 6 years, if the system establishes that it is taking all practicable steps to meet the requirements of subparagraph (B).