

Having Problems Getting Bacteriological Water Samples to the KDHE Lab on Time? There Are Other Options!



Public water systems in Kansas are experiencing problems with timely delivery of bacteriological samples because of delays with shipments by the Postal Service.

Many water systems across Kansas are having problems getting their bacteriological water samples to the KDHE lab in Topeka within the prescribed holding time. Even the KDHE lab confirms that many more replacement sample bottles have been sent out recently due to routine water samples being too long in transit. Submitting such samples is becoming more and more of a challenge. Presumably most of these problems are due to recent closing and consolidations within the United States Postal Service. Fortunately there are other options available for submitting water samples to KDHE. The purpose of this article is to summarize other options for shipping bottles to the KDHE lab.

The first issue is to clarify what holding time must be met when submitting bacteriological water samples. EPA would like samples to reach the lab within 30 hours. But KDHE uses a 48-hour holding time, citing that sample results are not changed by the additional 18 hours. I am also guessing that if the 30-hour holding time were used, there would be even more problems with

samples taking too long to reach the KDHE lab. Regardless, water systems should try to meet the 30-hour holding time if possible. If the transit time is more than 30 hours, but less than 48 hours, the lab will still analyze the sample. However, the result will include a disclaimer noting that the sample took longer than 30 hours to reach the lab. More importantly, it will be counted as an acceptable sample. If the sample takes longer than 48 hours to reach the lab, the original sample will not be analyzed and a replacement bottle sent to the system for recollection.

When to collect?

Always remember to collect samples on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday only. Samples should never be collected on weekends or holidays. Finally, KDHE recommends that the sample be collected shortly before mail leaves the local post office for its next destination. So for example, if the mail leaves your local post office at 4 p.m. daily, the water sample should not be collected at 8 a.m. that morning. Otherwise, several hours of holding time are wasted as the sample is sitting at the post office waiting to be shipped. Collect all samples as close as possible to the time of local post office shipment to help reduce transit time.

Delivery options

Other options for submitting bacteriological water samples are to use private delivery services such as Federal Express or UPS. In some cases, the cost to ship samples using such services can be significantly higher. But water systems also need to consider there are additional costs incurred if the system has to collect replacement samples. Driving to

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locations several times to collect replacement samples can also be costly, especially for rural water districts. But using such private services is definitely an option many water systems are now considering. If you are having problems submitting samples using the US post office, I suggest contacting one of these services. You may even find that they already make pickups near your location, making the transition smooth and convenient.

Another popular option is to use the private courier that KDHE used several years ago for picking up and delivering samples from all of the county health departments. Due to budgetary constraints, KDHE was not able to continue funding this service and it was

discontinued several years ago. But the courier, MetroCourier, Inc., is still in business and water systems can contract with them directly to pick up and deliver samples. MetroCourier is a private service out of Wichita, Kansas and can be contacted by phone at 800-640-6081. You can also contact Randy Boling, Vice President, at Randy@metrodelivers.com. MetroCourier presently covers most of the state with the exception of the area directly north of Salina up to the Nebraska border. They do an excellent job of getting samples to the KDHE lab within the 30-hour holding time. Their current charge is \$11.95 plus a fuel surcharge which varies. But according to Mr. Boling, the total charge has never exceeded \$14.00. They try to come to each customer or if not, a central location to pick up samples. And they make stops in many small communities across the state already. If you contact them, they can provide a schedule of pickup times and locations for many small communities. They also still serve most county health departments. So that is another option to investigate. Another important point



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is that MetroCourier does not charge per sample. Instead, they charge per pickup. So if you are sending more than one sample, the price for the pickup remains the same. This can be a real cost savings if you are able to collect both bacteriological water samples on the same day. Read further for more information.

The final option for solving slow delivery times is to stop using the KDHE lab and contract with a certified private laboratory closer to home. If you use a lab closer to your location, that should hopefully decrease shipping time and allow getting samples to the

lab within the prescribed holding time. Refer to the following link to find those private labs that are certified by KDHE to run coliform: www.kdheks.gov/labs/index.html. Look under "Laboratory Improvement Program Office (LIPO)" and the bullet that lists accredited environmental laboratories in the state. The major issue with switching to a private lab is to make sure that all analytical data gets forwarded to KDHE in a timely manner. Most private labs should already have some kind of procedure in place to submit data to KDHE, but that is something that needs to be discussed before making a switch. The water system also needs to contact KDHE to inform them you are switching labs and no longer want bottles shipped by the KDHE lab. I suggest contacting Jean Herrold with the KDHE Bureau of Water, Public Water Supply Section. Jean is in charge of all bacteriological monitoring requirements; she can help advise as to other options that might help comply with holding times. Jean can be reached by email at

jherrold@kdheks.gov or by phone at 785-296-5518.

Finally, if you operate a small groundwater system, you should consider collecting both bacteriological water samples on the same day. This is an option available only to small groundwater systems that are not under the direct influence of surface water. Collecting both samples on the same day may save money on sample collection and shipping. To be eligible to collect both samples the same day, your system must meet the following:

- Provide groundwater only to your customers
- Cannot be a surface water system or groundwater system under the influence of surface water
- Only required to collect two samples per month
- Must collect the two samples at non-adjacent locations per the system's written Bacteriological Monitoring Plan

If your system is interested in collecting both samples the same day, I suggest contacting Jean Herrold to get approval to do such.

Should you have other comments or questions about submitting bacteriological water samples, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at either (913) 850-8822 or jeff@krwa.net. Hopefully this issue with the US Postal Service can be resolved in the near future, saving many systems both the hassle and costs of collecting replacement samples.

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