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**From:** Koeneman, Crystal A (DEC) <Crystal.Koeneman@alaska.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 08, 2024 2:38 PM  
**To:** Helen Phillips  
**Subject:** FW: Village Safe Water/Best Practice Scores revisions  
  
**Importance:** High

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**From:** Koeneman, Crystal A (DEC)  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 10:49 AM  
**To:** Hoffman, Lyman F (LEG) <senator.lyman.hoffman@akleg.gov>; Sen. Donny Olson <Sen.Donny.Olson@akleg.gov>; Rep. Bryce Edgmon <Rep.Bryce.Edgmon@akleg.gov>; Rep. Neal Foster <Rep.Neal.Foster@akleg.gov>; Baker, Thomas C (LEG) <Rep.Thomas.Baker@akleg.gov>; McCormick, Conrad J (LEG) <Rep.CJ.McCormick@akleg.gov>  
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**Subject:** Village Safe Water/Best Practice Scores revisions  
**Importance:** High

Good morning,

DEC has heard the concerns expressed by communities and partners regarding the implementation of Operations and Maintenance Best Practices (O&M Best Practices) assessment tool for Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funding eligibility. To more effectively meet the needs of communities, collaborate with our partners, and ensure the efficient and timely use of the available funds, DEC will no longer use O&M Best Practices as an eligibility criteria for VSW CIP funding.

Below you will find an email that will be shared with Stakeholders shortly regarding VSW Best Practice scoring. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you and have a great day.

Crystal.

Crystal Koeneman  
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Good morning/afternoon,

The Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Village Safe Water Program (VSW) works with rural communities to address water and sewer infrastructure improvement needs. I am reaching out to you as a partner in this effort.

DEC is committed to ensuring communities have access to safe sanitation and that the ongoing operation and maintenance of the facilities are not overly burdensome to the residents. Additionally, DEC has heard the concerns expressed by communities and partners regarding the implementation of Operations and Maintenance Best Practices (O&M Best Practices) assessment tool for Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funding eligibility. To more effectively meet the needs of communities, collaborate with our partners, and ensure the efficient and timely use of the available funds, DEC will no longer use O&M Best Practices as an eligibility criteria for VSW CIP funding.

During the 2022 CIP funding cycle, VSW introduced the requirement that communities pursuing funding for first time piped service would be required to submit a Sustainability Plan demonstrating a realistic plan for funding ongoing operations and maintenance while maintaining affordable user rates for customers. DEC has developed guidance for communities developing Sustainability Plans and our Technical Assistance Programs, as well as the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development's Rural Utility Business Advisor (RUBA) program, are available to assist communities in this effort.

Additionally, as with all public water systems, communities will be required to demonstrate that they are capable of sustaining the utility before construction approval will be issued. We believe that the required Sustainability Plans and capacity assessments will provide sufficient assurance of local plans for sustainability, such that use of the O&M Best Practices for CIP eligibility is no longer necessary. This change in procedure will also provide DEC and our partners at RUBA greater opportunities to work directly with communities to develop the tools and resources necessary to successfully operate and maintain their facilities.

We will be making communities aware of this change shortly via the annual CIP funding announcement letter and holding an online question and answer session in the coming weeks. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out with your questions or concerns.