*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Emily Dixon. I’m a manager for LLA Performance Audit Services.

This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Progress Report: Safe Drinking Water Program.”

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate the Office of Public Health’s progress in addressing issues we identified in two previous reports.

In the first report – released in August 2016 – we made seven recommendations to improve the Office of Public Health’s – or OPH’s – monitoring and enforcement processes of the Safe Drinking Water Program.

In the second report – released in March 2017 – we made two recommendations to improve OPH’s assistance to water systems in the Capacity Development Program.

The Capacity Development Program requires OPH to help water systems achieve and maintain the technical, managerial, and financial capacity needed to provide safe drinking water.

OPH agreed with all nine recommendations from the two previous reports, and in this audit, we evaluated whether the office had implemented the recommendations.

Overall, we found that OPH fully or partially implemented six of the seven recommendations made in the 2016 report and one of the two recommendations made in the 2017 report.

Specifically, we found that since January 2017, OPH has created an additional 40 sanitarian positions and resumed collecting most water samples used to test for contamination. As a result, the number of monitoring violations decreased by 97 percent, from 905 in fiscal year 2016 to 27 in fiscal year 2021.

OPH also has improved in conducting sanitary surveys of water systems in a timely manner. During fiscal years 2016 through 2021, the office conducted required sanitary surveys on all 1,406 active water systems. In contrast, from fiscal years 2009 through 2014, OPH conducted only 1,075 – or 89 percent – of 1,208 required surveys.

In addition, we found that OPH escalated its enforcement actions when water systems did not correct violations for nine of 10 administrative orders we reviewed. This is also an improvement from our 2016 audit, in which we found that the office did not follow its enforcement process in five of the 15 administrative orders we reviewed.

OPH also has made improvements in issuing violations to water systems that do not notify their customers of non-compliance with drinking water regulations.

From fiscal years 2016 through 2021, the office issued violations to water systems for 2,348 – or 99.5 percent – of 2,359 unperformed public notifications, as required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In contrast, our 2016 audit found that OPH did not issue violations for 363 – or 35.4 percent – of 1,025 unperformed public notifications.

Finally, we found that OPH now collects additional financial and managerial information during onsite inspections to identify water systems that may need to take part in the Capacity Development Program.

In addition, OPH has started requiring participation in the Capacity Development Program as a remedial action in administrative orders. While OPH cannot issue penalties to water systems simply for failure to participate in the program, it can penalize the systems when they do not comply with other aspects of an administrative order.

As a result of our audit, we developed five recommendations.

We recommended that OPH work to amend iron and manganese monitoring requirements in state law and resolve the database issues that keep it from running complete reports to ensure it takes enforcement actions when water systems do not address deficiencies.

In addition, we recommended that OPH ensure it issues administrative orders for unresolved violations and develop a data system that tracks enforcement actions so non-compliant water systems can be identified.

Finally, we recommended that OPH implement its proposed point system into the grading schedule required by Act 98 so that water systems in the Capacity Development Program that develop a management plan can earn points toward a higher letter grade.

As part of its response to our report, which is detailed in the report’s appendix, the Office of Public Health agreed with all five recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*