



THE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR **WATER QUALITY REPORT**

Water knowledge is a right

Congress codified our right to know what is in our water in 1996 with amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1976, charging the EPA with setting drinking water standards for all public water systems.

Water utilities monitor and treat drinking water to abide by these federal standards. The 1996 amendments added a requirement for utilities to notify the public about any detected regulated contaminant and any water quality violation.

The centerpiece of these right-to-know provisions is the **annual water quality report**. Although these reports are intended to help consumers make informed choices about their drinking water, they can be confusing and full of jargon.

This guide is intended to help you understand what your water quality report is and how to interpret what it tells you.

Smart people concerned about health are catching on to the Bottled water industry's marketing con job, and about the toxic chemicals in the tap water. They now know that bottled water is an overpriced rip-off that's no more pure or healthful than tap water. Furthermore, its production and transportation gobbles energy and spews pollution and climate-changing gases into our atmosphere.

You probably have questions about the quality of your city or town's water supply. Although most municipal water beats the stuff in the bottle, learning more about it makes us smarter consumers.

What Is a Water Quality Report?

A water quality report, also called a consumer confidence report, lets you know what contaminants, if any, are in your drinking water and how these contaminants may affect your health. It lists all the regulated toxicants that were detected in your water over the preceding calendar year.

Who Gets a Water Quality Report?

A water quality report is available for every customer of a community water system, which is one that provides year-round service to more than 15 households or more than 25 people.

What Does a Water Quality Report Tell You?

Every water quality report must contain certain information:

- The source of the drinking water, be it a river, lake, groundwater aquifer or some other body of water;
- A brief summary of the state's source water assessment of the susceptibility of the source water to contamination and how to get a copy of the complete assessment;
- EPA regulations and health goals for drinking water contaminants;
- A list of all detected regulated contaminants and their levels;
- Potential health effects of any contaminant detected at a level that violates EPA's health standard;
- An educational statement for people with weakened immune systems about cryptosporidium and other microbial contaminants;
- Contact information for the water system and EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline

Why Is a Water Quality Report Important?

Your water system must tell you about any violation of EPA water quality standards at the time it occurs and again in the annual report. You should not drink water that fails to meet EPA standards because it may be unsafe. Thankfully, public utilities have worked hard to improve water quality, and today, more than 90 percent of water systems meet all EPA regulations.

Another important part of the report is the list of all detected regulated contaminants. EPA sets the maximum level of contaminants, called the MCL, that it will allow in drinking water based on the filtering and treatment capabilities of today's technology. The water quality report also tells you about potentially harmful substances found in your water at levels below their legal limit, which often is or approaches the agency's more stringent, optimum human health goal for the maximum level of contaminants, the MCLG.

Decoding the Water Quality Report of Our Nation's Capital

Maximum Contaminant Level Goal: Below this level, a contaminant has no known or expected risk to human health.

Maximum Contaminant Level: The highest amount of a contaminant EPA allows in drinking water.

The amount of a contaminant detected in D.C. drinking water.

Not detected

How does a contaminant end up in D.C. drinking water?

Water Entering WASA's Distribution System						
	Units	EPA Limits		DC Drinking Water		Description / Typical Sources of Contaminants
		MCLG	MCL	Highest	Range	
Inorganic Metal						
Arsenic	ppb	0	10	0.5	ND to 0.5	Erosion of natural deposits; Runoff from orchards
Barium	ppm	2	2	0.05	0.03 to 0.05	Erosion of natural deposits
Chromium	ppb	100	100	3	ND to 3	Erosion of natural deposits
Selenium	ppb	50	50	0.8	ND to 0.8	Erosion of natural deposits; discharge from mines

D.C. drinking water has some arsenic in it.

Ideally, drinking water should have no arsenic present to minimize health risks, but this is not the requirement.

EPA requires that the concentration of arsenic be 10 ppb or less.

The highest amount of arsenic detected in D.C. water is 0.5 ppb, which meets EPA requirements, although it is slightly more than the ideal level.

Arsenic enters D.C. drinking water from the erosion of natural deposits and from runoff from orchards.

Maximum Contaminant Level Goal: Below this level, a contaminant has no known or expected risk to human health.

Maximum Contaminant Level: The highest amount of a contaminant EPA allows in drinking water.

Treatment Technique: A required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water.

The amount of a contaminant detected in D.C. drinking water.

How does a contaminant end in D.C. drinking water?

WASA's Distribution System							
	Units	EPA Limits			DC Drinking Water		Description / Typical Sources of Contaminants
		MCLG	MCL	TT	Highest	Range	
Microbial Indicators							
Total Coliform Bacteria	% of total-coliform-positive samples	0	5% (maximum)		1.8%	0 to 1.8%	Naturally present in the environment
Fecal Coliform	Number positive	0	0	0	0	0	Human and animal fecal waste
E.coli bacteria	Number positive	0	0	0	0	0	Human and animal fecal waste

D.C. drinking has some coliform bacteria in it.

Ideally, drinking water should have no coliform bacteria present to minimize health risks, but this is not the requirement.²

EPA requires coliform bacteria to be present in no more than 5 percent of the samples taken in a month. (large systems, like D.C.'s, must test 210 times a month.)

During one month, D.C. found coliforms in 1.8 percent of the samples it took. This is the highest portion of positive samples that D.C. drinking water had in a month, and it meets EPA regulations, although it is slightly more than the ideal level.

Coliform bacteria enter D.C. water from the natural environment.

More information is available online at www.epa.gov/safewater/ccr/index.html.

For general queries about water quality reports and other safe drinking water issues, you can contact EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline toll-free at 1-800-426-4791.

www.AQUALISTIC.com