

17 July 2009

Circular Letter: WSP 6/09

To – each City and County Manager and Director of Services (Water Services).

Publication of Drinking Water Quality Monitoring Results.

I am directed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to refer to the European Communities (Drinking Water)(No. 2) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 278 of 2007) and also to the Water Services Act 2007.

The Regulations require each water services authority to prepare a monitoring programme to cover each water supply in their functional area and to monitor all water supplies for which they are responsible. Water services authorities, as supervisory authorities, are also responsible for ensuring compliance with the Regulations by water suppliers for which they have supervisory responsibility. The Regulations set out the parametric values against which water services authorities must monitor the compliance with quality drinking water standards.

The Regulations set out the requirements for the maintenance, on an ongoing basis, by water services authorities of up to date records of monitoring results relating to the quality of their own water supplies and all other water supplies for which they have supervisory responsibility. The Regulations require that these records should be available to the public for inspection.

The Regulations enable the Minister to issue guidelines on the maintenance of records in electronic format to facilitate public access. The Minister is also authorised under Section 30 of the Water Services Act 2007 Act to issue direction on the provision of public information and advice by water services providers and the format and content of records and reports.

The Minister has decided that water services authorities should immediately begin to publish on their websites the results of their monitoring of drinking water quality. To begin with, the results may be published using the styles and formats best served by the web applications currently in use by each individual water services authority. However, in the future, the Minister may direct that results are presented in a more consistent way across all authorities through the use of a standard template. In this event, the Department will consult in advance with all stakeholders as to how this can best be progressed.

When publishing information on the monitoring of drinking water quality, water services authorities should have regard to the following requirements:

1. Access to the water quality information should be made available from a prominent position on the home-page of the local authority's website.
2. In all cases where parametric values in the Regulations are exceeded, or where the HSE agrees that a supply of water intended for human consumption constitutes a potential danger to human health, water services authorities must ensure that results are available on their websites promptly, subject to the guidelines below. Notwithstanding the need to publish exceedances promptly, results should be published within one month of their receipt from the laboratory carrying out the analysis.
3. Where the results from an individual water supply fail to meet the parametric values specified in the Regulations, or if some other substance or micro-organism is detected as a result of monitoring, website publication should only take place after the Health Service Executive has been consulted and after it has confirmed whether or not there is a potential risk to public health. In the case of such incidents on public supplies, publication should take place after the EPA has been informed. In all cases where the HSE confirms that a potential danger to human health exists, the priority for the water services authority concerned must be to ensure that consumers are informed promptly and provided with the necessary advice. Details of the areas where supply is affected should be provided and where practicable, local maps highlighting affected areas should be published. Details of these cases should be notified to the EPA in accordance with the Agency's Guidance Booklet No. 1 regarding Regulations 9 and 10.
4. The information to be published should be presented in a user-friendly way using as simplified a format as possible, with technical language being kept to a minimum.
5. There is no necessity to publish the names and/or addresses of individual households where sampling takes place. However, descriptions of sampling locations need to be sufficiently detailed to show that a wide-

ranging and representative sampling programme is being carried out. Therefore, road or street names, townlands etc. should be included.

6. At a minimum, results in respect of the following parameters must be published :

Microbiological and Chemical Parametric Values:

- E.coli,
- Enterococci,
- Lead,
- Nitrate,
- Trihalomethane

Indicator and Other Parameters :

- Aluminium
- Turbidity
- Cryptosporidium (if tested for)

For each parameter, a description of the parameter and its significance should be included, along with the parametric value (where relevant) specified in the Regulations.

7. In addition to the parameters at 6 above, water services authorities may publish additional sampling data if they consider it appropriate and beneficial to consumers to do so.
8. It is recommended that authorities also publish :
 - Details of any notifications sent to the EPA under Regulations 9 and 10 of the European Communities (Drinking Water)(No. 2) Regulations 2007 (subject to the guidance in items 3, 9 and 10 of this circular) ;
 - The relevant local authority drinking water summary report from the most recent EPA Drinking Water Report ;
 - Drinking Water Audit Reports ;
 - The Remedial Action List of supplies in each local authority's functional area. This should include summary details of the action programmes implemented to improve the supplies and a timeframe for completion of the necessary works.
9. Advice, guidance or information provided by the EPA or HSE where no potential danger to human health exists need not be published routinely on the website as it may be specific to a particular set of circumstances, may not be generally applicable and may be misunderstood and cause

undue concern. However, where a water services authority is acting in accordance with advice provided, or where an action programme prepared in response to such advice or direction is being implemented, details should be published on the website.

10. Although protection of human health is a priority and potential dangers arising from any contamination incident or parameter exceedances must be promptly notified to the public, information should, where appropriate, be put in context to avoid causing unnecessary alarm.
11. Details of remedial action to be carried out should be given in addition to information regarding any temporary or alternative water supply being provided to consumers while that remedial action is being undertaken.
12. When problems are resolved, this should be clearly indicated on the website.
13. It may be appropriate to publish matters arising from items 3 and 9 to 13 inclusive separate to the sampling data referred to in items 6 and 7, utilising homepage headlines, news items and updates to same, press releases etc.

This circular should be read in conjunction with advice and guidance provided by the Environmental Protection Agency and by the Health Service Executive.

Any queries may be addressed to Mr. Tony Keogh (email: tony.keogh@environ.ie), ☎ 01 8882775 in Water Services Policy Section, or to the undersigned.

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Copy to - Environmental Protection Agency, HSE (National Office of Health Protection), GCCC, CCMA (Water Services Sub-group), Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, NFGWS, NRWSC, WSNTG.