

Basic Information

Demonstrating its commitment to public health protection and the public's right-to-know about local environmental information, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires community water systems to put **annual drinking water quality reports** into the hands of their customers. These reports (also known as consumer confidence reports), which EPA developed in consultation with water suppliers, environmental groups, and the states, will enable Americans to make practical, knowledgeable decisions about their health and their environment.

While water systems are free to enhance their reports in any useful way, each report must provide consumers with the following fundamental information about their drinking water:

- the lake, river, aquifer, or other source of the drinking water;
- a brief summary of the susceptibility to contamination of the local drinking water source, based on the source water assessments by states;
- how to get a copy of the water system's complete source water assessment;
- the level (or range of levels) of any contaminant found in local drinking water, as well as EPA's health-based standard (maximum contaminant level) for comparison;
- the likely source of that contaminant in the local drinking water supply;
- the potential health effects of any contaminant detected in violation of an EPA health standard, and an accounting of the system's actions to restore safe drinking water;
- the water system's compliance with other drinking water-related rules;
- an educational statement for vulnerable populations about avoiding *Cryptosporidium*;
- educational information on nitrate, arsenic, or lead in areas where these contaminant may be a concern; and
- phone numbers of additional sources of information, including the water system and EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791). [More information about the hotline is available on the following web site.](#)

This information will supplement public notification that water systems must provide to their customers upon discovering any violation of a contaminant standard. This annual report should not be the primary notification of potential health risks posed by drinking water, but will provide customers with water quality information from the previous calendar year.

The first reports were due October 1, 1999, and the reports must be distributed to consumers by July 1 each year thereafter. This rule affects approximately 53,000 water systems, and the information in the reports reaches some 273 million people nationwide. Large water systems mail the water quality reports to their customers, either with water bills or as a separate mailing, and take steps to get the information to people who do not receive water bills. Some smaller water systems (those serving fewer than 10,000 people) may be able to distribute the information through newspapers or by other means. The largest water systems must post their reports on the Internet, in addition to other delivery mechanisms, to make the reports easily accessible to all consumers. EPA will work with smaller systems to help get their reports online.

EPA is committed to use of the Internet as a way for citizens to find information about their drinking water. EPA has a local drinking water information Web page that offers links to many Internet-accessible water quality reports. In addition, the public can use the site to find specific information about local drinking water supplies, including information about the state's drinking water program and source water protection program.

- [See if your water system has its drinking water quality report online.](#)

As with other drinking water rules, states may set their own regulations for the reports from systems within their jurisdiction. The Safe Drinking Water Act and this rule allow states the flexibility to set alternative report requirements after public notice and comment, but the rule does set baseline standards to ensure that all consumers receive reports that are comparable and which include the same type and amount of basic information. Both EPA and the states can take enforcement action to ensure that consumers' right-to-know is respected by all water suppliers.

Consumer confidence reports are the centerpiece of the right-to-know provisions in the 1996 Amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Amendments contain several other provisions aimed at improving public information about drinking water, including the annual public water system compliance report and improved public notification in cases where a water supplier is not meeting a contaminant standard. The Amendments also call for increased public participation in the protection and delivery of safe drinking water. For example, citizen advisory committees are helping states to implement their source water assessment activities and are involved in decisions about allocating the state revolving loan fund that provides funding for drinking water infrastructure improvements.

To increase public awareness of the reports, the Agency established a right-to-know working group of its National Drinking Water Advisory Council, comprising representatives of the states, water systems, and consumer and public health advocacy groups. This working group advised EPA on a series of products to prepare the public for the information contained in the reports.