

Consumer Confidence Reports: *Information for Public Water System Customers*

Our drinking water is a precious resource that we often take for granted. Access to an adequate supply of safe drinking water is important for our personal health, as well as the health of our communities. For those who receive drinking water from a community water system, or public water supplier, having access to information about your individual source of drinking water can be very important.

To help build consumer awareness about drinking water supplies, the U.S. Congress in 1996 included public information provisions in their amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act. Those provisions require community drinking water systems to publish an annual consumer report. Each year, these reports are to be distributed before July 1st. They provide information from the previous calendar year. The report will most likely be referred to as either the “annual water quality report” or “consumer confidence report.”

About the Report

The format of the report differs from water system to water system. Some water systems publish their report as a simple two-page information sheet, while others use a brochure or booklet layout. Still others will publish the information in a local newspaper. Regardless of the style or format, the basic information included will be much the same. The Safe Drinking Water Act amendments and subsequent Kentucky Administrative Regulations specify information that must be included in these reports. As a consumer, you can expect to find similar information from any water system. Portions of the reports will be identical or nearly identical from water system to water system because they have been provided with text they must include. Other parts of the report will vary from water system to water system because the information will only apply to that particular system. The next few paragraphs of this document outline the information that will vary along with what will be much the same.

Information for Your Water System

- *About Your Water System*
 Every water system must include a name and phone number for a contact person in their report. They must also include information about meetings or hearings open to the public. Often, the report will include a note sharing set meeting dates. If a water system is part of a local government, the report may include the set meeting date and time for that governing body.
- *Source Water*
 Each drinking water quality report will inform consumers of the particular source or sources of raw water. The report will share if the source is a groundwater well or a local surface water body. In many cases, the raw water comes from more than one source. Water systems may use a particular stream or river as a primary supply but also have a reservoir that supplies their system. If the particular water source has a common name, it will be in the report. For example, Kentucky reports might indicate that a particular lake or pool of a river is the primary source (i.e. Barren River Lake, Kentucky River Pool 8, etc.)

- *Source Water (cont'd)*

The 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act amendments also created a new program to assess water sources for potential contamination. If your source of water has been assessed, the report will provide information about the results. The report will share how you can review or request a copy of the complete source water assessment. You may also find a brief summary of the potential sources of contamination identified.

- *Contaminants Found in the Water*

All reports will include a table listing any contaminants that have been detected in the water through the most recent testing. If the source of the contaminant is known, that will be listed. If the source is not known, the report will share likely sources. While these tables can be a challenge to read and understand, they share very valuable information. Several abbreviations and symbols may appear in the table, but the report must include definitions for these terms. To help you understand these terms, we have included “Keys to Decoding the Abbreviations” in this publication.

- *Compliance with Drinking Water Regulations*

If the water system has violated any drinking water regulations during the calendar year covered by the report, you’ll have the chance to learn more about them. This information may be shared through the data table or in the text of the document. The report will tell what the violation was and how long it lasted. If the violation was for being above a health standard for a particular contaminant, the report will share potential health effects. With all violations, the water system must outline for consumers the steps taken to correct them.

Information for All Water Systems

When the Safe Drinking Water Act amendments were finalized and the regulations for the annual water quality reports were developed, they included a number of standard educational messages which must be included in all reports. Following is a synopsis of these messages.

- *Explanation of Contaminants*

Each consumer confidence report will include a few short paragraphs explaining that all drinking water, including bottled water, may contain contaminants. The report will share general sources for five different groups of contaminants. As you read your report, you’ll also learn about the steps taken to ensure that your water is safe to drink. The phone number for the Environmental Protection Agency Safe Drinking Water hotline (1-800-426-4791) should also appear in all reports.

Keys to Decoding the Abbreviations

AL=Action Level

If a contaminant is found above this level, the water system is required to follow set treatment steps or take other action to reduce the level.

MCL=Maximum Contaminant Level

The maximum level of a contaminant allowed in treated water delivered to a water system user. This level is based upon health risk and includes a safety margin.

MCLG=Maximum Contaminant Level Goal

The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected health risk. MCLG’s do include a safety factor.

ND=Non-Detected

Indicates the particular substance was not detected in the water.

NTU=Nephelometric Turbidity Units

Turbidity refers to the murkiness or cloudiness of the water. NTU is the unit of measurement for this cloudiness.

pCi/l=Picocuries per Liter

This unit of measurement is used for radioactive contaminants, like radium, which may be found in water.

PPB=Parts per Billion

A measurement for drinking water contaminants. A level of one ppb can be thought of as one drop in one billion drops.

PPM=Parts per Million

A measurement for drinking water contaminants. A level of one ppm can be thought of as one drop in one million drops.

PPT=Parts per Trillion

A measurement for drinking water contaminants. A level of one ppt can be thought of as one drop in one trillion drops.

TT=Treatment Technique

For some contaminants, there is no set numerical MCL. In these cases, there is a required treatment technique which must be used if the contaminant is detected. “TT” indicates this for the applicable contaminants.

- *Special Messages for At Risk Groups*

Within our population, there are certain groups who may be more susceptible to drinking water contaminants. People whose immune systems are compromised in some way are typically most at risk. Persons with cancer who are undergoing chemotherapy, persons who have undergone an organ transplant, people living with an immune disorder like HIV/AIDS, some elderly and infants are most likely to have reduced immunities. Your annual water quality report will include this information, along with special information about why immune-compromised individuals are more at risk from cryptosporidium. [Cryptosporidium is a microbial parasite. It is found in surface water throughout the U.S. and can cause flu and diarrhea like symptoms when ingested.]

- *Information about Arsenic, Lead, Nitrate and Total Trihalomethane*

If your water system detects arsenic, lead, nitrate or total trihalomethane (TTHM) at or above set levels, your report will include an educational message for each specific contaminant found. For example, if your water system detects nitrates above 5 parts per million but below the health standard of 10 parts per million, the report will include the following statement:

“Nitrate in drinking water at levels above ten parts per million is a health risk for infants of less than six months of age. High nitrate levels in drinking water can cause blue baby syndrome. Nitrate levels may rise quickly for short periods of time because of rainfall or agricultural activity. If you are caring for an infant you should ask advice from your health care provider.”

Distribution of Reports in Kentucky

The number of customers served by a water system will determine how they must distribute their report. The following table explains the distribution requirements for water systems in Kentucky.

<i>Number of Customers</i>	<i>Distribution Method</i>
More than 100,000	Post report to a publicly accessible website and mail to all customers.
10,000 to 100,000	Mail to all customers.
500 to 10,000	Mail to all customers or publish the report in at least one newspaper serving the area.
Less than 500	Mail to all customers or provide notice to customers that the report is complete and available upon request.

All water systems, regardless of size, must make a good-faith effort to reach consumers of their drinking water who do not receive a water bill. Typically, these consumers will be either renters of residential property or workers in local businesses served by the water system. A variety of methods can be used to make this effort, including mailing to all postal patrons in an area (not just customers receiving bills), advertising the availability of the report through local media, posting the report in public places, and delivering the report to a community organization.

Your Right to Know

As a public water consumer, it is your right to know the quality of your drinking water. Reading your annual water quality report is the first step you can take to become a more knowledgeable consumer. So, look for your report each year. When you receive it, take the time to read it. If you don't receive a report by July 1st each year, or find it in your local paper, contact your water company to request a copy. As you're reading the report, write down any questions you may have. Contact your local water company to get the answers to those questions. Additional information is also available through the Kentucky Division of Water and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Online, visit the Kentucky Division of Water website at www.ky.water.gov or the EPA Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water at www.epa.gov/safewater. Via phone contact the Kentucky Division of Water at 502-564-3410 or the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791. Having a safe, adequate water supply is important to us all, and we all need to be proactive in seeking information.

References:

Kentucky Administrative Regulations. *401 KAR 8:075 - Consumer Confidence Reports*.

<www.lrc.state.ky.us/kar/401/008/075.htm> Accessed February 10, 2004.

Kentucky Division of Water. *Consumer Confidence Reports*. <www.water.ky.gov/dw/consumer/ccr/> Accessed February 10, 2004.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Consumer Confidence Report Rule: A Quick Reference Guide*. (EPA-816-F-02-026). Office of Water, Washington, D.C. November, 2002.

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