

## **Frequently Asked Questions Drinking Water Protection Regulation**

### **General**

1. How does the new regulation protect my drinking water?

**The new regulation sets mandatory and stringent standards and rules to protect the quality of Ontario's drinking water. These requirements include regular sampling and testing of drinking water, disinfection and treatment to destroy disease-causing organisms, clear notification requirements when there are adverse test results, and the posting of public notices for water that is untested or unsafe.**

**The regulation makes it clear what the rules are and who will be held accountable. It supports the public's right to timely and accurate information on drinking water quality, so that people can have confidence that their water is safe.**

**The regulation is part of Operation Clean Water, the government's action plan to ensure that Ontario's drinking water is the safest in Canada.**

2. How is the new regulation different from the previous policies?

**The new regulation puts into law, under the *Ontario Water Resources Act*, Ontario's tough standards for drinking water quality. Under the new regulation, large waterworks must meet minimum treatment requirements, have their drinking water tested by an accredited laboratory, immediately notify the proper authorities of adverse test results, and post notice signs to alert the public where water is untested or unsafe.**

3. What are some of these "health-related parameters" that are talked about such as microbiological parameters, turbidity, chlorine residuals and volatile organics ?

**Fecal coliform bacteria is a well known example of a microbiological parameter. The presence of fecal coliforms in drinking water is an indication of contamination by sewage or animal manure.**

**Turbidity or cloudiness in water is caused by the presence of tiny particles from matter such as clay, silt, spores, plankton and other microorganisms. Particles can often protect bacteria from being killed by disinfection chemicals such as chlorine.**

**Maintaining chlorine residual in the pipes that go to the consumer protects the quality of the drinking water. The absence of chlorine residual is an immediate indication of potential risk to drinking water or problems with the treatment process.**

**Volatile organics are chemicals that usually evaporate in the air but can also be dissolved in water. Trichloroethylene, a chemical commonly used in dry cleaning, is an example of a volatile organic.**

**Measuring these things regularly shows how effective the water treatment and distribution systems are at providing safe, clean drinking water.**

4. How will unsafe water conditions be communicated to the public?

**When test results do not meet the standards of the regulation, labs are legally bound to notify the waterworks, the Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of the Environment. Upon being notified, the owner/operator of the waterworks is legally bound to post a public notice.**

**Medical Officers of Health may also issue drinking water advisories or boil water orders.**

5. Is my drinking water safe?

**If you get your water from a communal waterworks, you should call your local waterworks owner for information on the quality of your water.**

**If you get your water from a private well, you should be testing your water regularly. If your water hasn't been tested, contact your local public health unit to find out how to get your water tested.**

6. What is a boil water advisory and how does it differ from a boil water order? What does a boil water advisory mean for my water?

**A boil water advisory is a strong recommendation to boil water while a boil water order has legislative authority under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act*.**

**A boil water advisory is issued by the local Medical Officer of Health when drinking water is considered unsafe. It means the water should NOT be used for drinking, making infant formula and juices, cooking, making ice, washing fruits, vegetables or brushing teeth. For these purposes, boiled water should be used. Before using water subject to a boil water advisory, the water should be brought to a rapid rolling boil for five minutes.**

7. If there is a public notice posted, should I drink the water?

**If you have concerns, the safest course of action is to avoid drinking water from sources where public notices are posted.**

8. Where may I find a copy of the regulation?

**The regulation is posted on the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca). The regulation will be posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry for a 30-day comment period even though the regulation will be in force as soon as it is gazetted.**

9. Does the regulation carry the same power that a law does?

**Yes. Regulations are law.**

10. What types of waterworks does the regulation apply to?

**The new regulation applies to large water treatment and distribution systems that require approval under the *Ontario Water Resources Act*, including municipal water works and other large systems. It applies to waterworks that:**

- are capable of supplying water at a rate of more than 50,000 litres of water on any given day, or
- supply water to 6 or more private residences.

**The new regulation does not apply to the following :**

- water works that supply 50,000 litres of water or less on at least 88 days in every 90 day period, unless the water works serves more than five residences, or
- water works that are not capable of supplying water at a rate greater than 250,000 litres per day, unless the system serves more than five private residences, or
- water works to be used only for supplying water, for agricultural, commercial or industrial purposes, that is not required under any Act or regulation to be fit for human consumption.

11. As the owner/operator of a waterworks subject to the regulation, what do I have to do right away?

**Owners/operators of waterworks subject to the regulation must:**

- have their drinking water sampled and tested by an accredited lab;
- make available quarterly reports to their consumers;
- provide public access to water quality information;
- if the lab advises that the results exceed specified limits:
  - report it immediately to the Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of the Environment;
- post public notice; and
- take corrective action;
- when reporting test results:
  - speak to a live person with the Medical Officer of Health and at the Ministry

- **of the Environment - there will be staff on call during off hours; and communicate in writing to the Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of the Environment;**

**Owners/operators of waterworks should check the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca) for more information on specific requirements.**

12. What are the penalties for non-compliance of the regulation?

**Penalties for non-compliance are already set out in the Ontario Water Resources Act. The penalties range from \$20,000 to \$2 million. Jail sentences can also be imposed for serious offences.**

13. How can the public be sure the water they drink from a commercial establishment is safe?

**Owners/operators of waterworks subject to the regulation are now legally bound to keep the public informed on drinking water quality by posting public notices for untested or unsafe water.**

**The regulation is broad-based and applies to all municipalities, as well as many owners/operators of waterworks across the province. The regulation sets out tough rules and standards to safeguard the quality of Ontario's drinking water.**

**For waterworks that are not subject to the regulation, the safest course of action for consumers is to inquire with the owner of the establishment about the quality of the drinking water.**

14. How much of the population are covered by the regulation?

**The majority of the population are covered by the regulation. The regulation is broad-based and applies to all municipal waterworks, as well as many owners/operators of waterworks across the province. Most of Ontario's drinking water is supplied by municipal waterworks.**

## **Requirements of the Drinking Water Protection Regulation**

15. When does the regulation take effect?

The regulation comes into effect when the regulation is gazetted, which we anticipate to be August 26th. However, requirements of the regulation for both waterworks and laboratories have varying effective dates. The regulation is posted on the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).

The regulation will be posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry for a 30-day comment period even though the regulation will be in force as soon as it is gazetted.

16. To whom do the requirements of the regulation apply?

The regulation applies to owners, operators and staff of large water treatment and distribution systems that require approval under the *Ontario Water Resources Act*, including municipal waterworks and other large systems; and laboratories that perform the required tests.

17. What are the basics of the requirements of the regulation?

Owners/operators must:

- sample and test their drinking water;
- disinfect all drinking water;
- make available to the public information on drinking water quality for their waterworks;
- prepare and submit quarterly consumer reports to the Ministry of the Environment, and make them available to consumers;
- post public notices for untested or unsafe water;
- ensure that only licensed staff or accredited labs perform tests on drinking water; and
- immediately notify the Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of the Environment when test results exceed standards or indicate adverse water quality, followed by corrective action.

18. When does disinfection have to be in place?

Disinfection of all water entering distribution systems of waterworks subject to the regulation must be implemented by December 31, 2002. For more details, consult the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).

If a waterworks currently does not have disinfection, the owner/operator must submit an action plan to the ministry by October 31, 2000.

19. Do all owners/operators of waterworks subject to the regulation have to produce engineers' reports?

**Only municipalities and waterworks that supply water to municipalities have to submit independent engineers' reports.**

20. Are there exemptions from disinfection?

**There are no exemptions for waterworks using surface water.**

**Owners/operators of waterworks that use ground water may apply for an exemption if they meet stringent requirements.**

## **Municipalities**

21. How does the new regulation affect municipal water treatment plants?

**The new regulation will increase the diligence of municipal waterworks that supply most of Ontario's drinking water. It requires mandatory testing, analysis by accredited labs, formalized reporting and publicly-accessible information.**

**It makes clear what the rules are and who will be held accountable.**

**It includes a process to review and consolidate all certificates of approval issued to a municipal water treatment facility to reflect the province's new tough standards.**

**The regulation is part of Operation Clean Water, the government's action plan to ensure Ontario's drinking water is the safest in Canada. The plan also includes a six-month intensive inspection of all municipal water treatment facilities in Ontario. We have already inspected about a third of all municipal water plants.**

22. What system upgrades are required of municipal water treatment plants?

**The regulation requires municipal waterworks to have an independent professional engineer prepare a report on the facility's operations, following a terms of reference prepared by the Ministry of the Environment. Once these reports are received, the ministry will review them, then prepare a new consolidated certificate of approval that reflects the new requirements and standards. These reports will identify necessary upgrades, if any, to the waterworks.**

**The ministry is also undertaking a rigorous inspection program, beginning with an intensive inspection of all municipal facilities. About one-third of the facilities have been inspected to date, and all inspections will be completed by December 31, 2000. The inspections will identify more clearly if there are significant problems and will provide the basis for corrective actions.**

23. How does the new regulation affect existing certificates of approval at municipal water treatment plants?

**Under the new regulation, all municipal waterworks must have a professional engineer prepare a report on the facility's operations, following a terms of reference prepared by the Ministry of the Environment. Once these reports are received, the ministry will review them, then prepare a new consolidated certificate of approval that reflects the new requirements and standards. These reports will identify necessary upgrades, if any, to the waterworks.**

24. If testing shows adverse results, what must the plant do? Who must be informed, and how quickly?

**When test results exceed health-related parameters or indicate adverse water quality, the following procedures must be followed:**

- **The laboratory that conducted the tests must immediately inform the Ministry of the Environment, the local Medical Officer of Health and the owner of the waterworks.**
- **On being notified by the laboratory, the waterworks owner must immediately inform the Ministry of the Environment and the local Medical Officer of Health, even though the laboratory has already done so. As well, the owner must post a public warning notice.**

## **Laboratories**

25. Where may I find a lab that can do the required tests of the regulation?

**A list of labs that can do the required tests under the regulation may be found on the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).**

26. How do I interpret my water test results?

**The lab conducting the test will advise you of the test results and notify you of any adverse results.**

27. What are the new drinking water safety standards under the new regulation?

**With the new *Ontario Drinking Water Standards*, the Ontario government has revised, updated and strengthened the *Ontario Drinking Water Objectives* to reflect the most current expertise and procedures in drinking water protection. The new regulation, made under the *Ontario Water Resources Act*, gives the new standards the force of law.**

28. How does a laboratory become certified?

**All laboratories that test drinking water must be accredited for the tests they perform. Accreditation is granted by a body such as the Standards Council of Canada, and involves performance testing and auditing to ensure that laboratories follow appropriate procedures using acceptable methods.**

### **Sampling, Testing and Analysis**

29. Can I do the tests myself?

**Licensed operators and staff of waterworks subject to the regulation may do the operational parameter testing. If a waterworks operates an accredited laboratory, they may also conduct testing on parameters they are accredited for. For details on who may do water testing, check with an accredited lab for advice, or the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).**

30. How do I find out about taking a water sample?

**Contact an accredited lab to find out how to take a proper water sample. A list of accredited labs in Ontario is available from the ministry's Web site at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca). You can also call the ministry's Public Information Centre at 1-800-565-4923.**

31. What do I have to test for?

**The regulation outlines exactly what needs to be tested. The regulation may be found on the ministry's Web site at [www.ene.on.ca](http://www.ene.on.ca).**

32. How often do I have to test the water?

**Requirements for frequency of testing for waterworks vary depending on the number of people served by the waterworks. Owners/operators of waterworks should check the regulation to find out how often they are required to test. The regulation may be found on the ministry's Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).**

33. How much do the tests cost?

**The cost of tests vary depending on the parameters you are required to test for and the fees charged by the lab doing the testing. It is best to consult a laboratory qualified to do all required tests for exact costs.**



34. What safeguards are in place to ensure people are informed if there are adverse test results?

**The regulation sets strict rules about who has to be notified if drinking water is not safe, and how and when notification must be made.**

**All drinking water tests in Ontario must be performed by accredited laboratories. When test results exceed health-related parameters or indicate adverse water quality, the following procedures must be followed:**

- **The laboratory that conducted the tests must immediately inform the Ministry of the Environment, the local Medical Officer of Health and the owner of the waterworks.**
- **Upon being notified by the laboratory, the waterworks owner must immediately inform the Ministry of the Environment and the local Medical Officer of Health, even though the laboratory has already done so.**
- **If the tests have been conducted on-site, the waterworks owner must immediately inform the Ministry of the Environment and the local Medical Officer of Health.**

**All notifications must be made to a “live” person, not an answering machine, and must be followed up in writing within 24 hours.**

**The local Medical Officer of Health will take whatever actions are necessary to protect public health, such as “boil water” advisories. The water system owner must correct the problem to make the water safe to drink.**

**In all cases where drinking water has not been tested, or where the drinking water does not meet acceptable standards and corrective action has not been taken, a public notice must be posted in a prominent location that is clearly visible to the public.**

### **Medical Officer of Health**

35. How would I find the Medical Officer of Health?

**A list of Medical Officers of Health may be found on the ministry’s Website at [www.ene.gov.on.ca](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca).**

36. What is the telephone number for the Ministry of the Environment’s Spills Action Centre?

**The toll free number is 1-800-268-6060.**

## **Posting Public Notices**

37. What information do I have to tell the public?

**Owners/operators of a waterworks subject to the regulation must:**

- **inform the public if they have not tested their drinking water to the standard of the regulation;**
- **inform the public if test results do not meet the standards in the regulation and corrective action has not been taken;**
- **publish quarterly reports and make them available to the public; and**
- **allow the public access to your water quality information.**

38. What should the public notices look like?

**A public notice must be in a prominent place and be clearly visible to the public. Signs are available by calling the ministry's Public Information Centre at 1-800-565-4923.**