

# When arsenic is detected in drinking water

## *Guidelines for water systems*

March 2008

DOH PUB. #331-166  
Revised

The maximum contaminant level (MCL) for arsenic in public drinking water is 10 parts per billion (ppb). This standard applies to Group A community (regularly serving more than 24 people or more than 14 connections) and non-transient, non-community public water systems. If arsenic is detected in drinking water, the water system must notify its customers. The exact message depends on the level of arsenic detected.

Below are messages that systems must include in their Consumer Confidence Report and resources they can use to reduce arsenic.

### **Consumer Confidence Reports**

State drinking water rules require Group A community water systems to include a statement about arsenic in their annual Consumer Confidence Reports (CCRs). At minimum, the statement must include the concentration of arsenic reported by the laboratory. Depending on the arsenic concentrations detected, water systems may also need to include educational information or discuss potential health effects.

Below are detection levels and suggested language from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Health Office of Drinking Water (ODW).

### **If the laboratory reports:**

**Arsenic below 5 ppb:** If arsenic is detected, but at a level below 5 ppb, the CCR must include the reported arsenic level, but there are no additional reporting requirements.

**Arsenic between 5-10 ppb:** In addition to the reported arsenic level, the CCR must include the following statement on health effects:

“Your drinking water currently meets EPA’s revised drinking water standard for arsenic. However, it does contain low levels of arsenic. There is a small chance that some people who drink water containing low levels of arsenic for many years could develop circulatory disease, cancer, or other health problems. Most types of cancer and circulatory diseases are due to factors other than exposure to arsenic. EPA’s standard balances the current understanding of arsenic’s health effects against the costs of removing arsenic from drinking water.”

**Arsenic above 10 ppb:** In addition to the reported arsenic level, the CCR must include the following statement on health effects:

“Some people who drink water that contains arsenic in excess of the MCL over many years could experience skin damage or problems with their circulatory system, and may have an increased risk of getting cancer.”



**Arsenic above 50 ppb:** The Department of Health recommends that you do not drink water containing more than 50 ppb of arsenic.

**Arsenic above 500 ppb:** We strongly recommend that you have no physical contact with water containing this much arsenic.

### **Financial Assistance for Water Systems**

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund may be able to help systems move toward compliance with the new arsenic standard by offering low-interest loans. ODW, the Public Works Board, and the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development administer this fund.

Information is online at [http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/Our\\_Main\\_Pages/dwsrf.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/Our_Main_Pages/dwsrf.htm)

### **Water Treatment**

Several treatment technologies remove arsenic from water. For help selecting the right technology for your system, see **Arsenic Treatment for Small Water Systems (#331-210)**. This 34-page guidance document explains when and how to treat water that does not meet the arsenic standard. You can get a copy by calling (800) 521-0323 or visiting the Web site at <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/dw/publications/publications.cfm> or.

### **For More Information**

**Call the Washington State Department of Health Office of Drinking Water:**

Southwest Region, Tumwater	(360) 236-3030
Northwest Region, Kent	(253) 395-6750
Eastern Region, Spokane	(509) 456-3115
Headquarters, Tumwater	(800) 521-0323

**Visit the following Web sites:**

Office of Drinking Water: [http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/our\\_main\\_pages/arsenic.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/our_main_pages/arsenic.htm)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/OGWDW/arsenic.html>

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts2.html>

