



guardians of drinking water quality
DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Pesticides

What are pesticides?

Pesticides are a general term for a very wide range of substances which are used as weed killers, insecticides, fungicides and other similar purposes. Rivers and ground waters may contain traces of pesticide as a result of agricultural use (pest control on crops) and non-agricultural use (herbicide for weed control on highways and railways).

What is being done to keep pesticides out of drinking water?

Over the last two decades water companies have invested in advanced water treatment using activated carbon alone or in combination with ozone to safeguard drinking water supplies until longer term wider efforts to encourage more careful use of pesticides result in improved river and ground water quality.

Water companies are required by law to assess the risk to each of their water sources from pesticides and monitor the raw water for those that could be present due to use in the local water catchments. When a specific pesticide is detected the information is provided to the Environment Agency who will investigate where the pollution is coming from.

What are the standards?

The European Drinking Water Directive set a standard of 0.1µg/l (microgrammes per litre) for each individual pesticide in drinking water. This corresponds to a concentration of 1 part in ten billion. This is not a health based standard; it was set by the European Commission in 1980 to reflect the limit of analytical methodology at the time and as an environmental policy to generally limit pesticides. The Directive also set a standard of 0.5µg/l Total Pesticides (the sum of all the substances detected in a sample). There are stricter separate health based standards for four named organochlorine pesticides which are no longer permitted to be used.

Summary statistics on the results of pesticide testing by water companies can be found on this website. You can obtain details of the results for your local water supply by asking your water company for a free water quality report. You can find contact details for your water company on your bill or on our website.

Who controls the sale and use of Pesticides?

The Health and Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Directorate is the competent authority for the prohibition and approval of pesticides in England and Wales. They can be contacted [here](#). The Environment Agency is the competent authority for prevention of pollution of rivers, lakes and ground water. They can be contacted [here](#).

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