



guardians of drinking water quality

## DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Area 7E, 9 Millbank  
c/o Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

Enquiries: 0300 068 6400

E-mail: [Marcus.Rink@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Marcus.Rink@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

DWI Website: <http://www.dwi.gov.uk>

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**To: Rory Stewart MP,  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment and Fisheries**

I am pleased to inform you that *Drinking water 2015* will be published on 14 July 2016. The report is the 26<sup>th</sup> published by the Inspectorate and it covers both private and public water supplies. This will be the last year that the report will be produced in the current format as we move towards a more concise and frequent publication enabling the water industry to take learning points earlier and consequently improvement sooner.

*Drinking water 2015* provides a record of the work of the Drinking Water Inspectorate in checking that water companies and local authorities have taken the appropriate action to maintain confidence in drinking water quality and safeguard public health.

Overall, in 2015, the figure for public water supply compliance with the EU Drinking Water Directive in England and Wales, was 99.96%. This figure is certainly good news and would indicate that the water supply is excellent, however, there remains a number of key challenges which the water industry has faced in 2015 and will face going forward that are not identified in this measure. Challenges include: source protection and metaldehyde; treatment works which were not sufficiently resilient, were too critical to fail and failed; distribution of water where risk assessments had not been shared; and, domestic distribution systems which retain residual and historical risks, all of which together, water companies, regulators and stakeholders will need to work together to reduce.

The picture in relation to private water supplies whilst improving continues to require keen focus with 4.5% of tests failing to meet the drinking water standards. Nonetheless, this figure represents an improvement when compared to the 9.6% of tests that failed in 2010, the year when reporting for private supplies was first introduced. Across England, the number of private supplies that had been risk assessed was 8,075 in England covering over two-thirds (65%) of all relevant private supplies. This compares favourably to the situation published in *Drinking water 2014* where it was reported that less

than two-thirds (60%). However, in 2015 there were 345 supplies in England that were a potential danger to human health where local authorities had to require the owners to make improvements and take steps to protect public health. In England, almost two-thirds (64%) of these failing private supplies are large supplies or supply commercial premises or premises where the public may access water e.g. B&Bs, cafés and tourist attractions.

During 2015, there were two events of significance related to private supplies where consumers and the public were put at risk: Illness as a result of an infection of *E.coli* 0157 was suffered by 22 members of three independent family groups holidaying at two cottages served by a private supply in summer 2015; and the use of a private water supply contaminated with trichloroethene (TCE) by a large food factory that resulted in the authorities issuing a Detention of Food Notice. The consequential direct costs incurred by the food company were of the order of £1million.

Appended to this letter is an expanded summary providing context of the above points, the details of which can be found in my full report on both private and public supplies. The learning points however this year serve as a salutary reminder that safe drinking water requires constant vigilance and careful maintenance by competent persons.

Additional to the private and public report and new for 2015 is the Business Performance Report. In this document, I outline the Inspectorate's statutory and non-statutory duties, strategic objectives, and our work and achievements during the financial year 2015/16 together with the forthcoming changes in drinking water legislation and regulation. This intends to facilitate understanding of how we work with others to ensure drinking water quality remains central.

Yours sincerely



Marcus Rink  
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water