



## DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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**To: Thérèse Coffey,**

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

I am pleased to inform you that *Drinking water 2016* will be published on 13 July. The report is the 27<sup>th</sup> published by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and covers both private and public water supplies.

*Drinking water 2016* provides a record of the work of the 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 2016, the figure for public water supply compliance with the European Union Drinking Water Directive in England and Wales, was 99.96%. This figure is certainly good news and indicates that drinking water quality is excellent. This figure has been consistent for the last 12 years and this year sees the introduction, by the Inspectorate, of a new measure designed to quantify risk called the Compliance Risk Index, (CRI). This focuses on the key consequences and actions by companies in response to failures of water samples to meet standards and decreasing figures indicate improving performance. For companies wholly or mainly in England, the national CRI was 4.85, a value already improving from the 2015 figure of 5.76 which was retrospectively calculated. The focus for 2016 and going forward are those parameters which contribute most to this index such as those arising from the environment, and in particular pesticides. We will also focus on taste, odour and nickel arising from domestic distribution systems and in particular lead from domestic supply pipes.

In 2016, two serious events were highlighted in the public supply which are shared for wider learning, the first of which concerned the supply of highly chlorinated water to consumers as a result of equipment, people and process inadequacies, the company was cautioned for this event. The second event occurred following the contamination of the local network with water from a factory with inappropriate backflow protection for which the company initiated a prosecution under the Water Fittings Regulations.

In 2016, the Inspectorate carried out a series of audits in response to emerging concerns about the safe delivery of treatment chemicals to water company sites. Following the audits a serious event occurred with a chemical delivery which illustrates the need for the industry to heed the learning and take action to prevent these events happening.

The picture in relation to private water supplies, whilst improving, continues to require keen focus with 4.2% 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 have been risk assessed is 8,043, covering two-thirds (66%) of all relevant private supplies. This compares favourably to the situation published in *Drinking water 2015* where it was reported that less than two-thirds (61%) had been risk assessed. However, in 2016 there were 330 private 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 over two-thirds (72%) of these failing private supplies are large supplies or supply commercial premises or premises where the public may access water, for example, B&Bs, cafés and tourist attractions.

The report on private water supplies shares three case studies for wider learning. The first involves the onward distribution of water from a water company supply through a tank which contributed sediment to the supply making it unwholesome. Through intervention by the Inspectorate the water company made a direct connection to the consumer. The second event was the prosecution by a local authority of the owner of a supply with responsibilities to supply others who had repeatedly refused to improve the supply even though a Notice was in force. The third was a complex supply for a salad producer where practices were contrary to current risk methodology and required significant investment of time by the local authority to improve the supply. This serves as a salutary reminder that safe drinking water requires constant vigilance and careful maintenance by competent persons.

Additional to *Drinking water 2016* covering private and public water supplies is the Business Performance Report. In this, I outline the Inspectorate's statutory and non-statutory duties, strategic objectives, and our work and achievements during the financial year 2016/17 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 a central strand of public health protection.

Yours sincerely



Marcus Rink  
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water