

U.S. NEWS

With Drinking Water, Safe Enough Is

When Americans turn on the tap, they expect a stream of fresh, clean water. After all, that's what the Safe Drinking Water Act promised four decades ago.

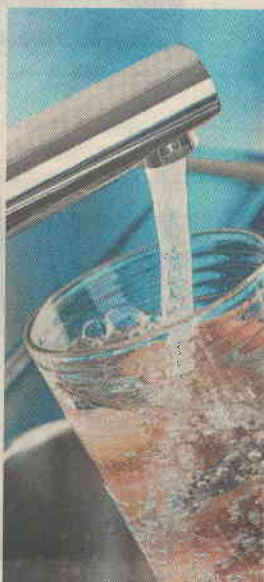
But when a public utility reports that its tap water is free of contaminants, it doesn't mean the liquid is pure, unadulterated H₂O. It means the water has low or undetectable levels of a limited number of chemicals and

pathogens the utility is required by law to monitor. At least that's how it's supposed to work.

Recently, there has been a steady stream of reports of tainted water. New Jersey's largest school district shut its water this past week because of elevated levels of

Consumer Disclosure

Public water systems must produce an annual consumer confidence report identifying the water source along with levels of regulated contaminants.



Sources: Citizens Energy Group; iStock (photo)

- A regulated chemical or pathogen
- Maximum contaminant level goal at which there is no known or expected health risk
- Maximum contaminant level, the standard for the highest level allowed in drinking water
- The average result used for judging compliance, along with the range of test results

Contaminant	MCLG (Goal)	MCL	2014 Results System Wide
Inorganics			
Arsenic (ppb)	0 ppb	10 ppb	ND
Barium (ppm)	2 ppm	2 ppm	0.10 (0.029 - 0.28)
Chromium (ppb)	100 ppb	100 ppb	BDL (ND - 2.2)
Flouride (ppm)	4 ppm	4 ppm	0.78 (0.071 - 1.1)
Nitrate (ppm)	10 ppm	10 ppm	0.89 (ND - 5.9)

Note: ppb = parts per billion; ppm = parts per million; ND = non-detect; BDL = below detection level

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

about 90 are regulated by the EPA.

The EPA's contaminant candidate list helps the agency prioritize substances for potential regulation based on risk and how often they are found in water supplies. When first published in 1998, it included 50 chemicals and 12 microbial contaminants.

The latest draft has added 12 chemicals and 12 microbial contaminants. Examples include pesticides and pharmaceuticals as well as pathogens such as E. coli.

The list is supposed to be updated every five years, and each time the EPA is required to determine whether to regulate at least five of the substances.

Only one contaminant, perchlorate, has been added to the regulated list in the past 20 years; 24 others are under review, but the agency has decided against regulating

Environmental Protection Agency decides which contaminants sub

the whole universe. Instead, the EPA regulates specific

In addition, it must be feasible for the nation's