



**DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE**

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9 April 2020

DWI Information Letter 03/2020

**To: Board Level and Day to Day Contacts of Water and Sewerage Companies and Water Companies in England and Wales**

Dear Sir/Madam

**Guidance on dealing with concurrent Drinking Water Quality or Sufficiency events during the CoViD-19 Outbreak**

**Purpose**

1. The purpose of this letter is to advise water companies of the Inspectorate's position and expectations in respect of water companies' duties in response to an occurrence of any event which has had an effect or likely effect on the quality or sufficiency of water supplied by the supplier occurring whilst national restrictions are in place as a result of CoViD-19
2. All existing notification requirements under the Water Industry (Suppliers' Information) Direction 2019 ('the Information Direction') and the supporting guidance on the notification of events remain in place.

**Introduction**

3. CoViD-19 is recognised by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) as an additional challenge to water companies when responding to a routine and concurrent event. It is in this context that water suppliers should act to protect public health in all situations. The provision of a wholesome and sufficient drinking water supply remains a critical service. Any interruption to this must be considered as the highest priority for a water company.
4. This guidance should be considered when companies are forming their water quality and sufficiency event, compliance or consumer complaint

response plan. Companies should continue to maintain all existing arrangements for liaison and support during events.

## Position

5. Water suppliers remain under a duty under the Information Direction 2019 to provide DWI with details of any failure or likely failure to meet regulations at all times. Guidance on the mechanism and timescales for notification of drinking water quality events including those outlined above is available separately on our website.
6. The type and nature of event which should be notified to the Inspectorate include: Loss of supply; failure of a treatment stage including disinfection, filtration, pesticide removal; faecal indicators; aesthetics; media and health concerns and risks. This list is not exhaustive and companies should refer to the guidance on the notification of events.
7. There may be situations where there is an imminent likelihood of failure. Companies are similarly obliged to notify the Inspectorate in such a circumstance. Examples of this may include but are not limited to loss of treatment and processes compromising disinfection, pesticide removal, taste and odour control, fluoridation, ingress into assets or network integrity where repairs have failed or not been carried out.
8. We understand that companies need to assess and prepare for various scenarios that introduce new challenges due to the current crisis.
9. Guidance on social distancing (from the UK Government and Welsh Government), self-isolation of consumers or the non-availability of staff, or contractor services which have ceased during this crises may cause specific difficulties. Such situations may include communications with consumers; for example, to boil the water or the provision of do not drink or use advice. Existence of the current guidance for Water and Health Professionals remains in force ([http://www.dwi.gov.uk/stakeholders/information-letters/2009/09\\_2009Annex.pdf](http://www.dwi.gov.uk/stakeholders/information-letters/2009/09_2009Annex.pdf)).
10. Whilst these expectations remain, water suppliers are encouraged to approach a solution in an innovative manner to comply with their duties to protect public health. By way of an example: companies may find it challenging to instruct consumers to carry out steps to protect their health by way of a boil water notice in a serious event in a traditional way such as card delivery by hand. However, it is expected that companies will use all tools at their disposal such as website notification, social media, texts and phone calls depending on the specifics of the issue.
11. Not all consumers may have access or are able to receive such messaging and companies should be ready to evidence that the means of communication is and has been effective and, where there are special circumstances, that they have taken additional action. This may be in the

form of a validation exercise to show that the appropriate messages have been received (by follow up phone calls, for example). They should also be able to demonstrate that they have sought to identify CoViD-19 specific vulnerable groups and to direct specific guidance to them where appropriate.

12. Provision of alternative water supplies during events such as treatment works shutdowns or failures, loss of storage capacity or network failures such as burst mains may also bring specific challenges. Water companies are expected to be familiar with their duties in the provision of alternative supplies but this includes a duty to maintain supplies at all times by means of pipes or other means.
13. Where companies must provide drinking water by other means, the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations apply at all times to water in bottles or containers. Additionally companies have a duty to provide minimum volumes of alternative supplies within a set timescale.
14. Companies will have well practised routines in setting up bottled water collection points, liaisons with Local Authorities and Local Resilience Forums and volunteer groups. We encourage these partnerships especially at this time.
15. The current situation creates exceptional circumstances and difficulties especially with access to the alternative supplies, such as those who are self-isolating or are vulnerable consumers. The expectation is that public health should not be compromised in difficult times for these consumers. Companies are expected to take extra effort to ensure they are aware of these consumers through their own vulnerable registers and that of the current centralised registration database to enable delivery to the doorstep of such consumers. In such an event, a review of the company action would be part of any event investigation.
16. The delivery of drinking water in bottles to doorsteps by companies will be a significant and additional logistic challenge. In considering the response, where these requirements cannot be practicably met, water suppliers should document those circumstances to justify any deviations from this requirement. That documentation should include details of how they have prioritised specific needs of different groups and how they tried to accommodate them.

## **Regulatory Duty**

17. Water companies are reminded that they remain responsible under The Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended), the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 (as amended) in England and the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2018 in Wales, to provide sufficient and wholesome water at all times. The guidance provided in this

Information Letter does not relieve companies of this obligation.

18. The letter remains in force only for the duration of the CoViD-19 outbreak, as designated by the Government.

## Enquiries

19. All enquiries regarding this letter should be made to Jacqueline Atkinson by email to [jacqueline.atkinson@defra.gov.uk](mailto:jacqueline.atkinson@defra.gov.uk).

This letter is being sent electronically to Board Level and day to day contacts. Please acknowledge receipt by email to [dwi.enquiries@defra.gov.uk](mailto:dwi.enquiries@defra.gov.uk). Hard copies are not being sent but the letter may be freely copied.

Copies of this letter are being sent to Christine McGourty, Chief Executive, Water UK; Jan Dixon and Kirstin Green, Deputy Directors Water Quality, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Eifiona Williams, Water Management Team, Welsh Government; Sue Petch, Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland; Catriona Davis, Drinking Water Inspectorate for Northern Ireland; Tony Smith and Chairs of the Regional Consumer Council for Water; Alison Cullen, Ofwat; Simon Moody, Environment Agency; Benedict Duncan, Food Standards Agency; and Stephen Robjohns at Public Health England.

Yours sincerely



Marcus Rink  
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water