

Drinking Water Officers' Guide

Introduction

Version 1.3 / First Published 2007

Ministry of Health



The Ministry of Health gratefully recognizes the health leadership of First Nations upon whose territories we live and work across the province, and of Métis and Inuit people living in B.C.

Introduction

1. Purpose of this Document

This document has been developed to promote effective, consistent and transparent administration of the [Drinking Water Protection Act](#) (the “Act”) and [Drinking Water Protection Regulation](#) (the “Regulation”) across British Columbia. It is intended to provide policy and procedural guidance to public health officials who are responsible for the implementation of this Act, recognizing the broad scope of regulatory authority conferred, and the demands placed on the human and financial resources of the regional health authorities in respect of this Act and other public health statutes.

In many respects, this document reflects policies and practices that have been applied by public health officials for years, based on prior legislation and professional expertise. This document seeks to assemble that knowledge and experience for the benefit of all public health officials and members of the general public, and to refine policy and practice to reflect the legislative regime established under the Act. This regime is based upon a multi-barrier approach, which seeks to address threats to drinking water at various stages, including its source, treatment systems, distribution, and at the tap.¹ It is part of an overall strategy set out in the Province’s [Action Plan for Safe Drinking Water in British Columbia](#) and reflects a comprehensive approach to drinking water protection based on sound risk assessment.

2. Updates in the 2024 Guide

The current 2024 amendment of the *Drinking Water Officers’ Guide* is an update to the 2022 version. It provides clarified guidance regarding the *Drinking Water Protection Act*. It also includes minor edits such as updated information regarding the responsibilities of various ministries related to drinking water since the establishment of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship in 2022.

¹ For a discussion of the multi-barrier approach to drinking water protection, see “From Source to Tap: The multi-barrier approach to safe drinking water,” May 16, 2002, Prepared by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Drinking Water of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Environmental and Occupational Health and the Water Quality Task Group of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/tap-source-robinet/index-eng.php>)

3. Application to health authorities

This Guide, including amendments made from time to time, was established by the Minister of Health on the 28th of March 2007, as a “guideline” under section 4 of the Act. Section 4 states:

- (1) The minister may establish
 - (a) guidelines that must be considered, and
 - (b) directives that must be followedby drinking water officers and other officials in exercising powers and performing duties or functions under this Act and the *Public Health Act* in relation to drinking water.
- (2) The Provincial health officer must monitor compliance of drinking water officers with guidelines and directives established under this section.

Drinking water officials must consider this Guide in the exercise of their duties and discretion. They are, however, able to depart from the Guide in any case where sound reason exists to do so (as discussed further below).

The appendices referred to in this document contain a number of sample forms, letters and similar documents that are not “guidelines” approved by the minister. These are included for convenience and reference only. Drinking water officials may use such sample materials contained in the appendices if and as they see fit, or they may use other materials, provided those are developed having due regard to the portions of the Guide to which the appendices relate.

4. Relationship to the Act and Regulation

While approved as a guideline under section 4 of the Act, this Guide does not have the force of law. If there is ever a conflict between this Guide and the Act, the Regulation or the principles of administrative fairness, this Guide is superseded by the latter authorities to the extent of any such conflict.

This document is only intended as a policy guide to inform the exercise of statutory discretion. Decision makers are expected to consider this document and to apply it as a general rule, but if application of this Guide is not considered appropriate to particular facts or circumstances, the provisions of this Guide should not be applied. The only exception relates to “directives” which may be issued by the minister, as “directives” must be followed. At present, there are no directives.

5. Overview of the Guide

The *Drinking Water Officers' Guide* is organized in three sections:

- Part A – Legislative Requirements
- Part B – Best Practices and Technical Assistance
- Part C – Appendices

5.1. Part A – Legislative requirements

Part A of this Guide is devoted to providing guidance around the legislative requirements in the Act and the Regulation. It will break down each section of the Act and Regulation and provide an interpretation of those sections that will assist drinking water officers throughout the province to remain consistent in their application of the legislation. In addition, Part A will provide an interpretation of the drinking water legislation as it relates to other legislation in British Columbia.

5.2. Part B – Best practices and technical assistance

Part B contains a series of documents designed to provide further assistance with the technical aspects of applying the drinking water legislation. For example, the legislation does not provide a detailed breakdown of treatment expectations; therefore, this document outlines treatment objectives based on the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality* (Health Canada).

Part B also contains a number of best practice documents. These documents were developed to provide drinking water officers with procedural guidance in the application of various administrative tasks such as finding small water systems or dealing with a request to investigate a drinking water threat. Each document in Part B is available for separate download on the [Ministry of Health website](#), allowing for easier distribution of pertinent information. The full Guide is also available as a single consolidated PDF.

5.3. Part C – Appendices

Various forms and documents are referenced throughout this Guide, with examples provided in the appendices. For example, there are samples of the following:

- Emergency Response and Contingency Plan
- Boil Water Notice
- Hazard Abatement and Prevention Notice

These are sample documents intended to provide the reader with an example of information that might be contained within each document. Health authorities

may wish to use these forms, or to replace them with standard forms for use within their authority.

6. Process for Guide Revision

Any questions or suggestions concerning this Guide, or proposed revisions, should be submitted to:

Attention:
Health Protection Branch
Ministry of Health
PO Box 9646
STN PROV GOV
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PH: (250) 952-1469
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Proposed revisions will be considered by the Drinking Water Leadership Council (discussed in Part A) on a regular basis. This Guide may be amended from time to time, subject to approval by the Minister.

The latest version of this document will be kept by the Secretariat of the Drinking Water Leadership Council and posted on the [Ministry of Health website](#).