



Drinking Water Complaints and Inquiries Process

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Ministry of Health

1. Purpose

The Health Protection Branch in the Ministry of Health is contacted from time to time by the public about concerns pertaining to drinking water, including:

- Complaints regarding a specific public health concern in a community (e.g. drinking water threat).
- Complaints regarding service provided by a health authority, or a policy a health authority has adopted.
- Complaints regarding a policy or service of the Ministry of Health's Health Protection Branch.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to the public and health protection staff on to how to file concerns, and what to expect once they are filed.

2. How Do I Make a Complaint or Inquiry?

There are a number of ways you can contact the Ministry of Health to make a drinking water complaint or inquiry. It is most efficient if you phone, email or send a letter to the Health Protection Branch:

Health Protection Branch

Population and Public Health Division
Ministry of Health

4th Floor, 1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, B.C., V8W 3C8
phone: 250-952-1469, fax: 250 952-1713
email: HP-PHW@gov.bc.ca

Hours of operation: 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, excluding holidays

When contacting us, please provide us with as much information as possible, including:

- Your name and contact information.
- The location of your concern.
- The nature of your concern.
- Names of individuals or businesses, or organizations related to your concerns and, where possible, contact information.

3. How Will My Concern Be Addressed?

3.1. Concerns about Drinking Water Systems

Many concerns received by Health Protection Branch staff are about a particular drinking water system, incident, event or situation occurring in the person's community.

Most of these issues fall under the jurisdiction of local health authorities, and are best addressed by their staff. Please contact health authorities directly. Health authority contact information is found on [this page](#).

If you are unable to reach the correct person at the health authority, the Health Protection Branch will be happy to assist by:

- Recording the name, contact information, and location of the complainant.
- Recording any pertinent details provided by the complainant.
- Referring the complainant to the relevant person in the health authority for follow up, and/or providing the complainant with contact information, and sources of further information.

Formal requests for investigations under section 29 of the *Drinking Water Protection Act* must be made **directly to your local health authority in writing**. If you are wishing to request an investigation under this section, Health Protection Branch staff can guide you to the appropriate contact person within your local health authority.

3.2. Concerns about Service Provided by Health Authorities

The Health Protection Branch from time to time receives concerns about service provided by health authorities. The health authority staff do not have a direct reporting relationship with the Ministry of Health. The Branch's initial response will be to help people find the right person in the health authority to follow up on their complaints, usually beginning with the supervisor.

Requests for **reconsideration** of a decision as per Part 6 of the *Drinking Water Protection Act* will be referred to health authorities.

Requests for **review** of decisions as per Part 6 of the *Drinking Water Protection Act* will be referred to the office of the Provincial Health Officer.

If, after following this approach, the complainants are not satisfied with the service they have received from the health authority, concerns can be brought to the Health Protection Branch. For these types of concerns, Health Protection Branch staff will:

- Record the name, contact information, and location of the complainant
- Record any pertinent details provided by the complainant, including:
 - The name of the organization about which the complainant is concerned.
 - Names of the people with whom the complainant has dealt.
 - The nature of the concern.
 - The measures the complainant has already taken to try to resolve the concern.
- Refer the concern to the relevant person in the health authorities for follow up, and provide the complainant with the contact information.

For more information, see the [Drinking Water Health Authority Contacts](#) website.

For a link to other public health agency contact information, see [this page](#).

3.3. Concerns about Policies or Services Provided by the Health Protection Branch, Ministry of Health

If you have views about the Ministry of Health's drinking water policies, its services or the way they are provided, or other inquiries, we would like to hear from you. Our staff value ensuring that all enquiries are treated properly and promptly. Let us know if you have an inquiry that needs answering, or if you are unhappy about:

- A decision we have made.
- Any aspect of our work.
- A member of our staff providing incorrect information or treating you unprofessionally.

When contacted, Health Protection Branch staff will:

- Record the name, contact information, and location of the complainant.
- Record any pertinent details provided by the complainant, including:
 - The name of the organization about which you are concerned.
 - Names and or titles of the people with whom you have dealt.
 - The nature of your concern.

Once we have received this information, we will either direct you to the right person or take a note of your complaint or inquiry, and pass it to him or her. We will usually do this within 24 hours, but please allow up to 20 working days for an initial response. If you do not have all the information above, we will work with you try to determine the best person to address your concern.

If your concern falls outside of the Ministry's range of responsibilities we will inform you of this and forward your complaint to the right service agency as quickly as possible.

As a learning organization, we value your feedback. Please let us know if your complaints or inquiries have been satisfactorily resolved and what steps we can undertake to improve our responses. We would also like feedback if you are satisfied with our response.

4. Still Not Satisfied?

If you have already contacted the Health Protection Branch and are still not satisfied, you can contact the Deputy Minister or Minister of Health for further consideration of your matter. Please put your concerns in writing and send them to the Minister of Health. A reply will be provided within 20 working days. Your complaint will be logged and tracked to ensure it is resolved.

Office of the Deputy Minister of Health

1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, B.C., V8W 3C8
Phone: 250-952-1911
Fax: 250-952-1909

Office of the Minister of Health

Phone: 250-953-3547
Fax: 250-356-9587
E-mail: hlth.minister@gov.bc.ca

If you are unhappy with the minister's response, you can also send a written complaint to the Office of the Premier.

5. Ombudsperson

If you are not able to reach a resolution and you feel that you have been treated unfairly by the Ministry of Health, you can refer your complaint to the Office of the Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson can:

- Provide information about what steps to take in dealing with a public agency.
- Try to settle complaints through consultation.
- Investigate complaints about administrative unfairness by a public agency.
- Make recommendations to a public agency to resolve an unfair situation.
- Report to the provincial legislature.
- Issue public reports.

Ombudsperson

Local phone: (250) 387-5855 (Greater Victoria area)
Toll-free phone: 1-800-567-3247 (all of B.C.)
In Person: 947 Fort Street – 2nd floor, Victoria, B.C., Canada
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday
By mail: PO Box 9039 STN PROV GOVT, Victoria, B.C., V8W 9A5, Canada
Fax: (250) 387-0198
Website: <https://bcombudsperson.ca/>