

Guide to Understanding Your Water Utility's Consumer Confidence Report

Clean Water Action believes everyone has a right to safe and affordable drinking water. Unfortunately, our drinking water sources are rarely pristine and almost all face contamination from different pollution sources. Our drinking water comes from rivers, lakes, shallow and deep-water aquifers. In Minnesota, about 75% of people get their drinking water from groundwater. *Are there contaminants in your drinking water? What are their levels, and should you be concerned?*

Under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), all US residents served year-round by a municipal water utility are entitled to information on the quality of their drinking water.

This report is known as a **Consumer Confidence Report (CCR)**. The SDWA only covers Public Water Supplies and is enforced nationally by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in Minnesota by the Department of Health (MDH).

If you get your drinking water from a private well, however, you will not receive a report.* The SDWA requires water utilities communicate specific information to consumers

in an annual report by July 1st of each year; the report may be delivered either by a hard copy mailing or electronic delivery. If you live in an apartment building or rental unit, your landlord is required to let you know how to access the information.



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The CCR provides a wealth of information, including:

- The source of your drinking water: lake, river, aquifer or purchased from another water provider.
- The levels of any contaminants found in your drinking water, and for comparison, the maximum level permitted by the EPA. This is called the “maximum contaminant level” (MCL).
- The Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) — The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs allow for a margin of safety and are non-enforceable public health goals. In other words, if money were not a factor and/or we put drinking water first in all pollution permitting decisions, this would be the standard to protect everyone’s health.
- The potential health effects of any contaminant detected at levels higher than the health standard, and an accounting of the system’s actions to restore your drinking water to a safe level.
- Phone numbers for additional sources of information, including the water system and EPA’s Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

**If you have a private well, you can learn more about what you can do to keep your well water safe to drink. See the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s [Private Ground Water Wells](#) website.*

City of Minneapolis 2018 Monitoring Results

Contaminant (units)	MCLG	MCL	Level Found Range (2018)	Average or Result*	Typical Source of Contaminant	Meets Standard
Fluoride (ppm)	4.0	4.0	.64 - .75	0.69	The state of Minnesota requires all municipal water systems to add fluoride to the drinking water to promote strong teeth; Erosion of natural deposits; Discharge from fertilizer and aluminum factories.	✓
Haloacetic Acids (HAAs) (ppb)	N/A	60	1.2 - 42.00	28.4	By-product of drinking water disinfection.	✓
Nitrate (as Nitrogen) (ppm)	10	10.4	N/A	.2	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits.	✓
TTHM (Total Trihalomethanes) (ppb)	N/A	80	6.2 - 45.90	28.7	By-product of drinking water disinfection.	✓
Turbidity (NTU)	N/A	TT	99.5% for the lowest monthly % of samples meeting the Turbidity limits	0.35 NTU Highest Single Measurement	Soil runoff.	✓
Chloramine (ppm)	4.0 MRDLG	4.0 MRDL	2.6 - 3.5 Lowest and Highest Monthly Average	3.18 Highest Quarterly Average	Water additive used to control microbes.	✓
Total Organic Carbon	25% - 30% Removal Required		Quarters below removal rate=0	52 - 63% Removal Achieved	Naturally present in the environment.	✓
Copper (ppm) (July 2018)	1.3	1.3 AL	90% Level .06	0 out of 50 sites over AL	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; Erosion of natural deposits.	✓
Lead (ppb) (July 2018)	0	15 AL	90% Level 3.8	2 out of 50 sites over AL	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; Erosion of natural deposits.	✓

The MCLG vs. the MCL:

According to EPA, a Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) is “the level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health.” MCLGs are set with a built-in margin of safety; utilities are not required to meet MCLGs.

A Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL), on the other hand, is the highest level of a contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. An MCL for a given contaminant is set as close to its MCLG as feasible using the best available treatment technology and taking cost into consideration.

Reading and Understanding Contaminant Levels

It is easy to be confused by the many tables of numbers, long scientific-sounding contaminant names, and scary sounding diseases caused by this pollution in your CCR, so let’s walk through a representative table found in a 2018 water report from a Minneapolis, MN water utility.

The example table above lists 2018 levels of contaminants such as: fluoride, nitrate, chloramine, copper, and lead — detected in the utility’s drinking water in 2018. Using nitrate (the third row) as an example, you can see in the column at the far right before the check mark, that the typical sources of nitrate in drinking water include: “Runoff from Fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks, sewage; Erosion of natural deposits.”

For consumers served by Minneapolis Water, nitrate in drinking water does not present a health issue. Why? Examine the columns labeled “Average” and “Range – Low to High,” and compare this to the columns labeled “MCL” and “MCLG”. Note that a level of 0.2 ppm** is far below the 10.4 ppm, the MCL.

Your CCR is an important source of water quality information, a sort of “report card” for water utilities. The CCR can also provide customers with good information on projects the utility may be undertaking to improve the quality of the drinking water. It can also be used as a tool for securing support for increased funding whether that be engaging friends, family, neighbors, and other community members to put pressure on decision makers to invest money in protecting our drinking water.

For more information on CCRs, contact your water treatment facility (use contact information on your bill), see the MDH’s website: [Consumer Confidence Reports](#), [EPA’s FAQ’s](#).

**A “ppm” or “part per million” is also referred to as milligram per liter, and is a way to express very low levels of substances in water. Just because it is small amount, though, does not mean it is necessarily safe, as some contaminants measured even smaller in the parts per billion (ppb) can cause health problems.