

T: 0131-244 0186 F: 0131-244 0259
E: colin.mclaren@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Mr Peter Brown
Strategy and Regulation
Scottish Water
Castle House
6 Castle Drive
Carnegie Campus
DUNFERMLINE
KY11 8GG

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Information Letter 1/2008

Dear Peter

TREATMENT OF RAW WATER

During August 2007 there were 6 Boil Water Notices in place on public drinking water supplies across Scotland. Four of these supplies were served by water treatment works where the only treatment applied to the raw water was disinfection. It is clear therefore that the lack of any physical treatment can result in a serious risk to public health, so this letter sets out Scottish Ministers' expectations in relation to the minimum level of treatment to which surface waters must be subjected under regulation 25 of The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 2001.

Background

Unless Scottish Ministers have specified in an authorisation that Scottish Water is not required to disinfect a raw water, Scottish Water must not supply water from any source which consists of or includes raw water unless the water has been disinfected and in the case of surface water, or water under the influence of surface water, subjected to appropriate further treatment. In many cases simple physical treatment e.g. rapid filtration and disinfection will be sufficient to ensure that Scottish Water carries out its duties under Part VI A of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980, namely the provision of "wholesome" water. However, Ministers' expect Scottish Water to take a risk based approach towards the provision of treatment and, where there is evidence that the risk is higher, consideration should be given to providing enhanced treatment.

Requirement

Scottish Water has indicated that it currently has 29 predominantly small water treatment works that take their raw water from a surface water source, or a source under the influence of surface water, where the only treatment applied is disinfection. To ensure that Scottish Water is complying with the duties imposed on it by Scottish Ministers', Scottish Water must now submit a programme of improvement for the 29 sites identified. The improvement programme should be prioritised on a risk basis and be complete by March 2014.

Ministers are aware that Scottish Water is currently preparing its first draft business plan for 2010 to 2014. If Scottish Water is already planning work at any of the 29 sites identified and if this work does not include the provision of appropriate physical treatment, then Scottish Ministers' expect Scottish Water to extend the scope of the work to ensure that appropriate physical treatment is included. Furthermore, it is our understanding that there are capital projects being undertaken during the current investment period at some of the 29 water treatment works where there is presently no physical treatment. Any capital works planned for the current investment period should therefore take account of the duties imposed by Ministers and the scope of the works extended appropriately.

It is important to emphasise that Ministers' expect Scottish Water to take a risk based approach towards the provision of treatment and only where there is evidence that simple physical treatment and disinfection at a site is likely to be inadequate to protect public health should Scottish Water consider providing enhanced treatment. Scottish Ministers look to Scottish Water to provide appropriate treatment on a site by site basis.

Further Information and Enquiries

A copy of this letter is being sent to Alan Scott (Scottish Water), Bob Irvine (Scottish Government) and Ian Tait (Water Industry Commission).

Enquiries about this letter should be addressed to Philip Anderson (Tel No: 0131 244 0188) or Email: philip.anderson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk. Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Colin McLaren
Deputy Director Drinking Water Quality