

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

5000 OVERLOOK AVENUE, S.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20032

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER

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September 29, 2004

Dear Customer:

On Thursday, September 23, 2004, DC WASA exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) monthly maximum contaminant level for total coliform. This means that we are now in violation of this drinking water standard.

The EPA and the Department of Health have been very clear, however, that the violation of the monthly bacteria standard is NOT a health emergency. A rise in total coliform is an important indicator that you should know about, but again there is no action required of customers at this time. WASA's health advisors recommend that if your doctor has advised you to always avoid drinking any tap water because you have a weak immune system that may be the result of chemotherapy, HIV/AIDS or other conditions, you should carefully follow your health care provider's instructions.

Coliform bacteria are a naturally occurring, widespread group of bacteria that are found in soil, on vegetation and animals. Coliform bacteria are also believed to be a part of the bacterial film that ordinarily coats the inside wall of water system pipes. Coliform are generally harmless, but their presence in drinking water at increased levels means there is potential for more harmful bacteria to be present. Although coliform bacteria have been detected in more samples than normal, our tests show no presence of more harmful bacteria.

Why are there more total coliform bacteria in the water than usual?

EPA and Washington Aqueduct officials believe that the system-wide addition of orthophosphate on August 23, 2004, along with warm summer weather are the likely causes for the increased detection of coliform bacteria. Orthophosphate is used by the Washington Aqueduct to help stop lead from leaching from lead service pipes and lead-bearing plumbing fixtures.

How are public officials responding?

To address the total coliform issue, the Aqueduct is maintaining the presently high disinfectant levels in the system. WASA is accelerating system-wide water main flushing already underway. We are responding as soon as possible to customers who experience red water or need other assistance. WASA is also diligently following EPA's public notification requirements for this violation of the monthly standard; a newspaper notice will be published, and we are distributing our notification to you with this letter.

Keeping residents informed is a top priority. For more details read the enclosed information and watch for media updates in the *Washington Times* and local community papers. Contact us at 202-787-2732 and visit our web site at www.dcwasa.com for more information.

Sincerely,

Jerry N. Johnson
General Manager