



# Background on Drinking Water Standards in the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA)

## Summary of SDWA Related to Contaminants:

- Congress enacted the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) in 1974 and amended and reauthorized it in 1986 and 1996.
  - Main federal law that ensures the quality of Americans' drinking water
  - Authorizes EPA to set national standards for drinking water to protect against health effects from exposure to naturally-occurring and man-made contaminants
- Drinking water standards only apply to public water systems (not individual private wells).
- EPA works with states, localities, and water suppliers who carry out these standards.

## Drinking Water Standards Apply to Public Water Systems:

- Public water systems are those having at least 15 service connections or serve at least 25 people for at least 60 days a year.
- Over 150,000 public water systems across the U.S. serve more than 300 million people.

## Three Types of Public Water Systems:

- **Community Water Systems (CWSs)**
  - Provide water to the same population year-round (for example: homes, apartment buildings)
  - Approximately 52,000 systems serving the majority of the U.S. population
- **Non-Transient Non-Community Water Systems (NTNCWSs)**
  - Provide water to same people at least six months a year, but not all year (for example: schools, factories, churches, office buildings that have their own water system)
  - Approximately 85,000 systems
- **Transient Non-Community Water System (TNCWS)**
  - Provide water where people do not remain for long periods of time (for example: gas stations, campgrounds)
  - Approximately 18,000 systems

Drinking water standards may apply differently based on type and size of public water systems.

# SDWA Processes Involving Drinking Water Contaminants:

- **Contaminant Candidate List (CCL)**
  - Requires EPA to develop a list of unregulated contaminants that are known or may occur in drinking water
  - Publish every five years
- **Regulatory Determination for CCL**
  - Requires EPA to decide whether to regulate at least five CCL contaminants with a drinking water standard every five years
  - Specifies three criteria (adverse health effects, occurrence in public water systems, meaningful opportunity for health risk reduction)
- **Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring**
  - Requires EPA to establish criteria for a program to monitor at least 30 unregulated contaminants every five years
- **Regulation Development**
  - If EPA decides to regulate a contaminant via the regulatory determination process, the Agency has 24 months from the time of the determination to propose a regulation and 18 months from the proposal to finalize the regulation.
  - The SDWA requires evaluation of a number of factors in the standard setting process.
- **Six Year Review**
  - EPA is required to review each standard every six years and, if appropriate, revise the standard.
  - Any revision must maintain or improve public health protection.
  - If a regulation is revised, EPA goes through the standard setting process again and evaluates a number of factors.
- **National Contaminant Occurrence Database (NCOD)**
  - Requires EPA to assemble and maintain a national drinking water contaminant occurrence database using information for both regulated and unregulated contaminants in public water systems

For a more detailed summary of how these various drinking water contaminant provisions of SDWA work together, read [How EPA Regulates Drinking Water Contaminants](#).

For more information on broader provisions of SDWA, select the [Safe Drinking Water Act website](#).