

IN DEPTH

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CONSUMER CONFIDENCE REPORT (CCR)

In 1996, Congress passed amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act (P.L. 104-182). One of the “findings” that was included in the preamble to the legislation was that “consumers served by public water systems should be provided with information on the source of the water they are drinking and its quality and safety, as well as prompt notification of any violation of drinking water regulations.”

Thus, the amendments included a requirement for a periodic report about water system quality to the system’s customers, called the Consumer Confidence Report.

The provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments that created the Consumer Confidence Report, and the subsequent regulations to implement the Act, were extremely detailed. They tried to provide important information about the water system’s performance and safety during the previous year - certainly a worthy goal. However, the document that was designed was unnecessarily lengthy and relied heavily on technical terms and charts that have little useful meaning to consumers.

Briefly, the requirements are that each municipality with a water system must mail to each customer of the system at least once annually a report on the level of contaminants in the drinking water. This includes:

- Information on the source of the water;
- Maximum contaminant level goal;
- Maximum contaminant level;
- The health concerns that resulted in regulation of each regulated contaminant,
- Variances;
- Exemptions;
- Information on compliance with national primary drinking water regulations;
- Notice if the system is operating under a variance or exemption and the basis on which it was granted;
- Information on the levels of unregulated contaminants; and
- A statement that the presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that the drinking water poses a health risk.

Municipalities have followed the requirements of the Act and regulations, mailing a lengthy report to every customer of the system every year - while chaffing over the cost of the requirement and its lack of useful information.

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Smaller municipalities, however, may benefit from alternative provisions in the Act and regulations that could save some effort and cost.

The Act included a provision that the governor of a state may elect not to apply the mailing requirement to a water system serving fewer than 10,000 persons. The state of Illinois has adopted this provision for the state's water systems. The alternative requirements for systems with less than 10,000 persons are:

1. For water systems with a population between 501 and 10,000 with no drinking water violations the previous year, the municipality must:
 - a. Prepare the Consumer Confidence Report;
 - b. Publish the entire Consumer Confidence Report in a local newspaper (in a conspicuous location and in print size which is easily readable);
 - c. Inform customers that the report will not be mailed;
 - d. Make the report available upon request; and
 - e. Mail a copy of the Consumer Confidence Report, newspaper clipping, and notice of availability to the Illinois EPA.

2. For water systems with a population of 500 or less with no drinking water violations the previous year, the municipality must:
 - a. Prepare the Consumer Confidence Report;
 - b. Provide notification to customers that a Consumer Confidence Report was prepared and is available upon request (the notice could be posted in a conspicuous location, provided directly to each customer, or published in a local newspaper);
 - c. Make the reports available; and
 - d. Mail a copy of the Consumer Confidence Report and the notice of availability to the Illinois EPA.

Note that these alternative approaches for distributing the Consumer Confidence Reports are *optional*. Municipalities with less than 10,000 population may continue to mail the reports if they choose.

If you have questions on the alternative approaches, you may contact Mike Crumley at the Illinois EPA (217) 524-6586.