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Umwelt Bundes Amt
For our Environment

Germany's drinking water rated "very good"

Cases of guideline limit exceedence remain exceptional

At all larger waterworks, the incidence of exceedence of guideline limits is rare. The example of nitrate is one of elevated concentrations sometimes occurring in groundwater, whereas in drinking water there are no such incidences. Virtually all microbiological and chemical quality requirements comply with stringent legal guidelines at a rate of more than 99 percent. These are the results of an updated report on drinking water quality issued by the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG) and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) which provides an evaluation of the 2008-2010 time period. The report is based on information submitted by the *Länder* to BMG and UBA. UBA President Jochen Flasbarth states, "There is peace of mind when drinking the water in Germany. Its quality properties continue to receive top marks."

As the most vital of all foodstuffs drinking water must meet high standards. The Drinking Water Ordinance (*TrinkwV*) defines these standards, stipulating that water may contain no pathogens or substances in concentrations that might be harmful to health and must be "pure and fit for human consumption."

The rate of exceedence in the monitoring data recorded in 2008-2010 was between one and three per cent, and these incidences were exceptional cases traceable to a few individual ingredients in plant protection agents or to coliform bacteria. In both cases, the samples did not originate tap water but rather from waterworks or directly from the pipeline network. 99 percent of all drinking water samples taken from the tap were unobjectionable. The latest data confirm the downward trend observed for nitrate of previous years. Whereas the exceedence rate for nitrate was 1.1 percent in 1999, it dropped to virtually zero per cent in 2010. This trend does not, however, lead to conclude that the nitrate content in groundwater or in bodies of water is also decreasing. Nitrate content in drinking water has been reduced largely through exhaustive treatment measures as well as through mixing with less polluted water. Exceedences of lead, on the other hand, have not been measured at waterworks but instead in lead pipes and fixtures that do not meet the standards of best available technique. This is usually the same reason for exceedences in levels of copper, nickel and cadmium.

When limit values are exceeded it does not necessarily pose a health risk, as this depends on the quality criterion concerned and on the level and duration of exceedence. Many coliform bacteria, for instance, are not infectious in humans but their presence in drinking water registers as an overall deterioration of water quality. Hence there is a need to carry out additional tests to determine the cause and, if necessary, to take preventative measures to protect public health.

Further information and links:

Why a report on drinking water quality?
The EC Drinking Water Directive makes it mandatory for Member States to submit a drinking water report once every three years. Germany's report is based on data submitted by the *Länder* to the BMG and UBA. The obligation to report applies to some 2,360 water utilities (and the associated pipeline network and domestic drinking water systems). Water utilities provide an average of 1,000 cubic metres of water per day each year, supplying more than 5,000 people. Altogether some four billion cubic metres of drinking water are supplied to about 90 percent of the population in Germany.

The third report by BMG and UBA on drinking water quality in Germany (2008-2010) is here:
http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/4238.html
The first and second joint BMG and UBA report on drinking water quality in Germany is here:
http://bit.ly/xjDkUD

General information about drinking water
UBA guide entitled *Rund um das Trinkwasser* (in German):http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4083.html
Flyer about lead and drinking water (*Blei und Trinkwasser* – in German): http://bit.ly/xNzdXK

More consumer information about drinking water quality in a specific supply area is available from the responsible public health office or individual water utility.

Dessau-Roβlau, 19 January 2012