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Drinking water: It's the last metres that count!

Drinking Water Ordinance amended – pipes and fittings to become even safer

The Drinking Water Ordinance is introducing the first binding provisions on the materials that come into contact with drinking water. These latest amendments are set to enter into force on 13 December 2012. The supply of drinking water from the public water utility to households throughout Germany is generally of very good quality. In cases of detected contamination of drinking water, the pipes in the building are usually to blame; that is, faulty materials are installed for pipes, fittings or tubing. These materials can leak unwanted substances into the drinking water. Errors in planning, installation and choice of material installed in the system can result in the spread of pathogens such as *legionella*, which can cause pneumonia. This situation can occur especially when the water has stagnated too long in the pipes. The amendments to the Drinking Water Ordinance will allow the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) to establish binding standards in the assessment of materials' hygienic suitability for use. These standards will gradually replace the non-binding guidelines which were effective up to now. Two years after these standards become effective, new installations and maintenance work of water supply systems (for drinking water) may only use materials that meet the requirements of these standards. The amendment to the Drinking Water Ordinance also makes provisions for more practicable control of *legionella*.

Property owners should already make sure when building or servicing drinking water supply systems that the plumber only uses products whose materials have been certified as safe to use. Up to now the Federal Environment Agency had issued non-binding guidelines and recommendations on materials such as plastics, elastomers (e.g. rubber gaskets and membranes), coatings, lubricants and metals. The Federal Environment Agency will upgrade these guidelines and recommendations to 'valuation criteria' in the next 1-2 years, in accordance with the amended Art. 17 Drinking Water Ordinance (*TrinkwV 2001*). Other material groups will be added as necessary. By the end of two years following the announcement of the valuation criteria, manufacturers must have adjusted their products to meet these requirements. When new drinking water supply systems are installed, plumbing companies may no longer use any materials that do not comply with the standards. If plumbers and property owners are already

using materials that adhere to the guidelines issued by UBA, they should experience no difficulty with compliance in future.

Everyone can do his own bit independent of this to make sure the water supply system does not affect drinking water quality. Stale water should not be used to prepare food or for drinking; instead, use only fresh and cool water from the tap. It is advisable to let the water run before using it: a half minute is usually enough to get it running fresh and cool. This procedure ensures that any potential residues from materials in the system are rinsed out. New building, maintenance work and repairs to drinking water installations should only be done by professionals in the field who are listed with the water utility. They are the only ones who know the properties of the local water, which materials are suitable for use in the supply area and what technical regulations must be complied with to avoid the spread of diseases such as *legionella*. The amendments to the Drinking Water Ordinance also make provisions for more practicable regulations governing the monitoring of *legionella*. The definition of 'large-scale plant for heating drinking water' **has been refined**. Bureaucracy has also been cut down: these installations must only be reported to the health authorities if the levels of *legionella* which trigger technical measures are detected. This clause was introduced to the Ordinance in 2011. The owners of large blocks of flats must carry out routine checks every three years. The first check must be completed by 31 December 2013.

To see the amendments to the Drinking Water Ordinance (*Trinkwasserverordnung 2001*) see Federal Gazette Nr. 58 of 13 December 2012 here:

http://www.bgbl.de/Xaver/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&bk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&start=/*%5B@attr_id=%27bgbl112s2562.pdf%27%5D

Report on drinking water quality in Germany (in German):

<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4238.html>

More information about UBA guidelines and benchmarks go to

<http://www.uba.de/wasser-e/themen/trinkwasser/verteilung.htm>.

Important consumer information is available in the *Trink-was* brochures at

<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3058.html>

and in *Rund um das Trinkwasser* at

<http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4083.html> (in German).

Dessau-Roßlau, 13 December 2012