

ACQWS Paper No. 2

Publication of Water Quality Data

Preamble

Water quality has become a much talked about subject in recent years. In response to greater interest of the public in the quality of drinking water, WSD proposes to publish the water quality data in Hong Kong on the Internet and also in the form of a leaflet, and proposes to follow the general practice of other water supply organisation in so doing.

Publication of water quality data in UK

2. In the UK where water supply has been privatized, the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), which is the regulator, publishes an *annual* report on drinking water quality for England and Wales. In the report, performance of the water companies and data on exceedance of standards (EC Drinking Water Directive) are provided.

3. Citizens of the UK may also approach the relevant water companies for water quality information relating to their own supply. There are public enquiry channels for customers to request for information. These companies are required to maintain records of the results of monitoring at their offices.

Publication of water quality data in USA

4. In USA, water supply undertakings are required by law to publish drinking water quality data *annually*, including data on any contaminant found in the local water sources. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), water systems serving 100,000 or more people must post their water quality reports on the Internet to make them easily accessible to all consumers.

Publication of water quality data in other countries

5. In Sydney of Australia, *quarterly* publication of selected parameters determined by New South Wales Health is available to the public through the Internet.

6. For Singapore, information such as the treatment of water, purification chemistry and some typical values for the treated water quality parameters are provided on the Internet.

7. Other cities such as Tokyo of Japan, Auckland of New Zealand and Vancouver of Canada, do *not* provide water quality data on the Internet.

Compliance with guidelines/standards for drinking water quality

8. In 1999/2000, over 25,000 treated water samples in Hong Kong were taken from treatment works, service reservoirs, connection points and consumers' taps and tested. The test results indicate that the water we supply conforms to the Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). In accordance with international practice, compliance is based on annual average and occasional non-compliance is not considered as a breach of the water quality standard. It should be noted that

WHO states that "short-term deviations above the guideline values do not necessarily mean that the water is unsuitable for consumption". The USEPA stipulates that "for systems which are conducting monitoring at a frequency greater than annual, compliance with the maximum contaminant levels is determined by a *running annual average* at any sampling point".

WSD's views on publication of water quality data

9. From the information gathered above, it is evident that many water undertakings around the world (e.g. USA, UK) produce *annual* statistics of key parameters of drinking water quality on their Internet Homepages. Notable absences of information are also found.

10. To be in line with the world trend of publishing water quality information, WSD proposes to publish an annual report on the Internet on drinking water quality data on physical parameters, chemical parameters of health significance (including inorganic constituents, organic constituents, pesticides and disinfectant by-products), and bacteriological quality. In addition to the drinking water quality data, the following information will also be included in the annual report: sources of water, treatment process, WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality and subjects of recent interest (e.g. trihalomethanes, *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*).

11. Although it is not a worldwide practice to release raw water quality data, WSD intends to publish also water quality data on Dongjiang water as received at Muk Wu Pumping Stations in view of public interest on the subject.

Advice Sought

12. Members' views on the subject are sought.

April 2000