No ‘Forever Chemicals’ Found in Drinking Water

Recent samples of City drinking water detected no “forever chemicals” or PFAS, Perfluorinated and Polyfluorinated Substances, which are manmade chemicals used in a vast number of consumer and industrial products. PFAS are found in everything from nonstick cookware, fast food wrappers and Gore-Tex clothing, to fire-fighting foam. They are often referred to as “forever chemicals” because they don’t break down easily. The characteristics that make PFAS useful in products are the reason they persist in the environment and can build up in our bodies. This is a problem because PFAS have been linked to cancer, reproductive and immune system harm, and other diseases.

Regulations to eliminate products containing PFAS have worked to phase out many products containing them in this county; however, due to the persistence of these chemicals, they are still found as a contaminant in some drinking water sources.

Federal regulators have responded to concerns about PFAS by requiring that water providers monitor for these compounds. Washington state drinking water regulators have taken it one step further and set very low limits for five PFAS compounds in treated water starting in 2024. At the City of Bellingham we didn’t want to wait. We sampled our treated drinking water for PFAS compounds in 2022. We looked for them at parts-per-trillion levels and are happy to report that we detected none of the PFAS chemicals assessed. We will continue to monitor for PFAS and report the results in future editions of this report.
In accordance with federal and state regulations, the table below includes all results from contaminants that were detected or are above the state detection reporting limit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter (2022 or most recent)</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Public Health Goal or MCLG</th>
<th>Maximum Allowable MCL</th>
<th>Bellingham Drinking Water Range or Reported Value</th>
<th>Average Value or Highest Result</th>
<th>In Compliance?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Coliform Bacteria</td>
<td>% Positive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5% positive per month</td>
<td>2% positive in July. 1% positive in August. 0% positive all other months. No E. coli bacteria were detected.</td>
<td>2% positive in July.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Residual Chlorine Levels</td>
<td>ppm</td>
<td>Detectable in 95% of samples</td>
<td>4.0 MRDL</td>
<td>Range:&lt;0.02 to 0.93 ppm</td>
<td>Average 0.50 ppm free available chlorine</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haloacetic Acids-5 (HAA-5)</td>
<td>ppb</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Range: 7 to 18 ppb</td>
<td>Highest site 14 ppb</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Trihalomethanes (THM)</td>
<td>ppb</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Range: 16 to 50 ppb</td>
<td>Highest site 39 ppb</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turbidity</td>
<td>NTU</td>
<td>&lt;0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 0.92 to 0.07 NTU at or below 0.3 NTU 100% of the time.</td>
<td>Highest value 0.07 NTU</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead (2020 sampling)</td>
<td>ppb</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>6 ppb as the 90th percentile</td>
<td>&lt;1 to 12 ppb</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper (2020 sampling)</td>
<td>ppb</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>1300*</td>
<td>65 ppb as the 90th percentile</td>
<td>2 to 118 ppb</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lead and copper are monitored every 3 years in our customers’ homes to assess the amount of corrosion occurring in home plumbing. The water sampled is the first draw of stagnant water in homes identified as having lead solder and copper pipe. There are no lead service lines in Bellingham. Sampling will next be conducted in 2023.

Treatment Technique is a required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water. *The 90th percentile value of all samples collected.

**Secondary maximum contaminant levels are limits that are not based on health concerns, but instead based on the aesthetic properties of water such as taste, color, and odor.

**Definitions**

**Action Level (AL):** The concentration of a contaminant which, if exceeded, triggers treatment or other requirements that a water system must follow.

**Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL):** The highest level of a contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. MCLs are set as close to the MCLGs as feasible using the best available treatment technology.

**Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level (MRDL):** The highest level of a disinfectant allowed in drinking water. There is convincing evidence that addition of a disinfectant is necessary for control of microbial contaminants (e.g., chlorine, chloramines, chlorine dioxide).

**Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG):** The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs are set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.