City of Bellingham WASHINGTON

2025 Water Quality REPORT

INSIDE THIS PUBLICATION, you'll find water quality and testing information showing that Bellingham's drinking water meets or exceeds all state and federal safety standards. Also included is information on how you can stay involved in decisions impacting your drinking water, how we are protecting our drinking water source by acquiring land around Lake Whatcom, and how your investment supports safe, reliable services every day.

Our Watershed

Bellingham's drinking water comes from Lake Whatcom and the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River. Water from 36 streams, fed by rain and snowmelt, flows into the 250 billion gallon lake, with a watershed that covers 35,000 acres or 55 square miles. The lake periodically receives water diverted from the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River by the City of Bellingham to meet water supply needs. Lake Whatcom supplies water to over 100,000 customers every day, drawn through a 1,200 foot wooden pipeline to the water treatment plant in Whatcom Falls Park where it is cleaned, tested, then delivered to homes, businesses and water districts throughout our community.

"Clean, reliable drinking water is something we all depend on every day. In Bellingham, that reliability starts in our watershed and continues through the investments we make together in our water system. This Water Quality Report reflects not only the high quality of your drinking water, but also the shared commitment of our community to protect Lake Whatcom and plan responsibly for the future."

BELLINGHAM MAYOR KIM LUND

Future Reports

Starting in 2027, our water quality reports will be available to our customers electronically at **cob.org/water-quality-monitoring**. If you would like to continue receiving a printed copy of the water quality report, please let us know either via email (askpw@cob.org) or by calling (360) 778-7700.

Informes Futuros

A partir de 2027, nuestros informes de calidad del agua estarán disponibles electrónicamente para nuestros clientes en **cob.org/water-quality-monitoring**. Si desea seguir recibiendo una copia impresa del informe de calidad del agua, por favor déjanos saber ya sea por correo electrónico (askpw@cob.org) o llamando al (360) 778-7700.

Get engaged

Stay up to date on decisions and progress

- **Engage Bellingham:** engagebellingham.org
- **City of Bellingham news:** cob.org/news
- **Water Treatment Plant Tour:** Want to learn more about where your drinking water comes from and how we treat it? Join us for a tour on **Monday, May 18, 10 –11 a.m. or 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.** Please RSVP in advance – space is limited! Askpw@cob.org

Este informe contiene información importante acerca de su agua potable. Haga que alguien lo traduzca para usted, o hable con alguien que lo entienda.

City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

Detected Regulated Contaminants

2025 Water Quality analysis results

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.

Water system ID number **05600**

Parameter (2025 or most recent)	Units	EPA REGULATIONS: Public Health Goal, MCLG, or MRDLG	EPA REGULATIONS: Maximum Allowable MCL	BELLINGHAM WATER RESULTS: Bellingham Drinking Water Range or Reported Value	BELLINGHAM WATER RESULTS: Average Value or Highest Result	BELLINGHAM WATER RESULTS: In Compliance?
Total Coliform Bacteria	% Positive	0	5% positive per month	1% positive in Jul and 2% positive in Aug and Sep due to contaminated sample stations. 0% positive all other months. No E. coli bacteria were detected.	2% positive in August and September	Yes

Bellingham collects over 120 samples a month at locations throughout our water distribution system and analyzes these for coliform bacteria to ensure water purity. No more than 5% of these samples can be positive for total coliform bacteria and none can be positive for *Escherichia coli* (E.coli). No E. coli was detected in 2025.

Free Residual Chlorine Levels	ppm	Detectible in 95% of samples	4.0 MRDL	Range:< 0.02 to 1.07 ppm	Average 0.46 ppm free available chlorine	Yes

Bellingham monitors chlorine levels continuously at the water treatment plant. Over 120 distribution system samples are also analyzed each month to ensure a disinfectant residual remains in treated water on its way to our customer's homes. We must be able to detect free chlorine in 95% of the samples we analyze in the distribution system.

Haloacetic Acids-5 (HAA-5)	ppb	0	60	Range: 8 to 17 ppb	Highest site $\bar{X}$ 14 ppb	Yes
Total Trihalomethanes (TTHM)	ppb	0	80	Range: 13 to 43 ppb	Highest site $\bar{X}$ 33 ppb	Yes

Haloacetic acids and total trihalomethanes are formed as byproducts of the drinking water chlorination process. The HAA-5 and TTHM results are from 8 representative locations in Bellingham's treated water distribution system. Compliance is based on a site-specific running average. The highest site average from 2025 is shown above.

Turbidity	NTU	< 0.3	Treatment Technique	Range: 0.02 to 0.05 NTU At or below 0.3 NTU 100% of the time.	Highest value 0.05 NTU	Yes

The turbidity limit is 0.3 NTU. In 2025 no filtered water turbidity result exceeded 0.3 NTU so Bellingham met the Department of Health's limit 100% of the time. Treatment Technique is a required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water.

Lead (2023 sampling)	ppb	0	15^	3 ppb as the 90th percentile	< 1 to 7 ppb	Yes
Copper (2023 sampling)	ppb	1300	1300^	90 ppb as the 90th percentile	11 to 216 ppb	Yes

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. The lead service line inventory results can be accessed at this link: https://cob.org/services/utilities/water-distribution/service-lines. Sampling will next be conducted in 2026. ^The 90th percentile value of all samples collected.

Inorganics without a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) with results above the state detection reporting level (SDRL):

Hardness	ppm			21.8	21.8	Yes
Sodium	ppm			10.5	10.5	Yes

Inorganics without an MCL, having a SMCL*, with results above the SDRL:				Bellingham Level 2025	SMCL Limit Allowed*	
Chloride	ppm			5.8	250	Yes
Manganese	ppb			< 1	50	Yes
Sulfate	ppm			7.1	250	Yes

ppb = parts per billion, or ug/L
ppm = parts per million, or mg/L

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

For more information, contact our Water Quality Technical Supervisor Rich Hoover at (360) 778-7874 or rhoover@cob.org

Drinking Water Sources

The sources of drinking water (both tap water and bottled water) include rivers, lakes, streams, ponds, reservoirs, springs, and wells. As water travels over the surface of the land or through the ground, it dissolves naturally occurring minerals and, in some cases, radioactive material, and can pick up substances resulting from the presence of animals or from human activity. Contaminants that may be present in source water include:

Microbial contaminants, such as viruses, parasites, and bacteria that may come from sewage treatment plants, septic systems, agricultural livestock operations, or wildlife.

Inorganic contaminants, such as salts and metals, which can occur naturally or result from urban stormwater runoff, industrial or domestic wastewater discharges, oil and gas production, mining, and farming.

Pesticides and herbicides, which may come from various sources such as agriculture, urban stormwater runoff, and residential uses.

Organic chemical contaminants, including synthetic and volatile organic chemicals, which are by-products of industrial processes and petroleum production. They can also come from gas stations, urban stormwater runoff, and septic systems.

Radioactive contaminants, which can occur naturally or result from oil and gas production and mining activities.

Drinking water, including bottled water, may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants.

The presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that water poses a health risk. More information about contaminants and potential health effects can be obtained by calling the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (1-800-426-4791).

To ensure that tap water is safe to drink, the Department of Health and EPA prescribe regulations that limit the amount of certain contaminants in water provided by public water systems. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Washington Department of Agriculture regulations establish limits for contaminants in bottled water that must provide the same protection for public health.

Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as persons with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, persons who have undergone organ transplants, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly, and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers.

EPA/CDC guidelines on appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by Cryptosporidium and other microbial contaminants are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (1-800-426-4791).

Elevated levels of lead in drinking water can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. In Bellingham, fortunately, lead is not found in the treated water, but lead in drinking water can come from pipes and faucets in our customers' homes. The City of Bellingham is responsible for providing high quality drinking water, but cannot control the variety of materials used in customers' plumbing. When your water has been sitting for several hours, you can minimize the potential for lead exposure by flushing your tap for at least 30 seconds before using the water for drinking or cooking. You can capture this water to use on plants. If you are concerned about lead in your water, you may opt to have your water analyzed by a local laboratory.

Treatment and distribution:
Keeping our system running smoothly

Bellingham's drinking water comes from Lake Whatcom and flows into our treatment plant through a screenhouse where large debris is removed. It then enters the pre-treatment system known as Dissolved Air Floatation (DAF), where staff add aluminum sulfate and tiny bubbles of air to the water which causes small particles and algae to clump together and float to the surface. This is then skimmed off, and a small amount of chlorine is added to the water. Water then flows into a flume where staff add a polymer to help remove even smaller particles, before being filtered through one of six filter chambers of anthracite coal and silica sand.

After filtration, water moves into reservoirs where it receives additional chlorine and sodium carbonate to keep our water safe and drinkable. Water quality is monitored throughout the treatment process and across our community as it flows through the distribution system. We test all treated water to ensure it meets the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Washington State Department of Health.

Your continued investment through your monthly utility bill keeps our system running smoothly and efficiently. Much of our water distribution system has met its planned lifespan and is due to be replaced over the next 20 years. We are making replacements and upgrades now to continue providing you with safe, reliable drinking water. In 2025, we responded to 51 watermain breaks and replaced 2.2 miles of watermain, including:

- **1932 cast iron watermain** on 15th street between Knox and Mill
- **500 feet of damaged watermain** in the 2000 block of Grant Street
- **105 feet of watermain** in support of the 14th Street fish passage project

A landmark year for Lake Whatcom land protection

Protecting Lake Whatcom – Bellingham's drinking water source – begins with protecting the land around it. Our long-standing Lake Whatcom Land Acquisition and Preservation Program does just that by purchasing properties from willing sellers within the Lake Whatcom watershed to prevent future development and restore natural forested conditions.

2025 was the program's most successful year yet. Using funds from watershed fees on utility bills, we purchased 1,056 acres last year alone, bringing the total amount of City-owned protected land in the watershed to more than 3,800 acres.

Acquiring the land is only the first step. Once purchased, dedicated City field staff step in to maintain and monitor all 3,800 acres year-round. Their work ensures these forests remain healthy and continue to protect water quality and wildlife habitat for generations to come. In 2025 alone, staff planted 4,610 native plants in the watershed and carried out essential restoration activities – from removing invasive species to cleaning up litter to decommissioning unauthorized trails.

Why does this matter? Because healthy forests naturally filter and absorb pollution from stormwater, reducing the pollution that reaches Lake Whatcom. The science backs this up. The City partners with Western Washington University's Institute for Watershed Studies to monitor Lake Whatcom and the streams that flow into it (called tributaries). Their 2025 findings show that streams flowing through forested areas typically have better water quality than those in more developed parts of the watershed.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?
Visit the Lake Whatcom Land Acquisition and Preservation Program website at cob.org/lw-property.

Definitions

Maximum Contaminant Level or 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 Contaminant Level Goal or MCLG: The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs allow for a margin of safety

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

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.

Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level Goal (MRDLG): The level of a drinking water disinfectant below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MRDLGs do not reflect the benefits of the use of disinfectants to control microbial contaminants.