



DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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[Redacted]
By email: [Redacted]

Our ref: EIR2025/14322
16 July 2025

Dear [Redacted]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Water Quality, contaminants, sources of aluminium and health risk assessment

Thank you for your request for information of 1 July 2025 about water quality, contaminants, sources of aluminium and health risk assessment. We have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your information request and our response are set out below.

I request the following information regarding drinking water quality in the Farlington Central zone:

1. *Aluminium was recorded at 382.8 µg/l, far exceeding the legal limit (200 µg/l), with the source marked as “unknown.”*

What do you know about this exceedance? Has geoengineering/aerial spraying been investigated as a potential cause?

This breach of standards was thought to be due to mobilisation of historic mains sediments in the Farlington Central network. Follow up samples were all compliant with regulations, indicating that the issue was probably due to flow changes in the network due to e.g. burst mains or hydrant usage by third parties. Portsmouth Water (hereinafter called “the Company”) agreed to investigate and undertake a programme of flushing at hydrants to reduce levels of sediment in the network. This was completed in March 2024. Geoengineering and/or aerial spraying has not been investigated by DWI as a potential cause.

2. *Coliform bacteria was detected at 1 cfu/100ml (limit is 0).*

What caused the breach, and when was the public informed?

Investigations by the Company did not reveal any other properties were affected or that a wider problem existed. A follow up visit revealed kitchen tap hygiene was an issue, and the consumer was advised to clean their tap. The public were not informed, as there was no evidence of it being a public health issue.

3. *Fluoride is present at up to 1.5mg/L, and I consume 3–4L of water daily during a life time.*

Please provide all studies, reviews, or risk assessments DEFRA holds on the long term health effects of fluoride ingestion at this rate, including any documented health benefits or harms.

The DWI does not hold this information. The Department of Health and Social Care is responsible for national policy on fluoridation. They can be contacted via their website at: <https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health>

The information is therefore exempt under regulation 12(4)(a) of the EIRs, which relates to information which is not held at the time when an applicant's request is received, please see below for further details in relation to this exception.

Please note that the Farlington Central Zone is not fluoridated and the maximum sample level of natural fluoride in the Farlington Central Zone in 2024 was 0.111mg/L, well below the regulated standard of 1.5mg/L. For further information on fluoride, please see our leaflet: (<https://www.dwi.gov.uk/consumers/learn-more-about-your-water/fluoridation-of-drinking-water/>).

4. *PFAS, chlorine, phosphoric acid, and aluminium sulphate are added to the water.*

Provide internal risk assessments proving these are safe for long term human ingestion.

Chlorine, phosphoric acid and aluminium sulphate are added to water during the treatment process.

Chlorine is used as a disinfectant see leaflet <https://www.dwi.gov.uk/consumers/learn-more-about-your-water/chlorine/>. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set a health-based guidance maximum value of 5mg/l, and the background document for the development of this standard can be found at: <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/water-sanitation-and-health/chemical-hazards-in-drinking-water/chlorine>

Phosphoric acid is used as a lead inhibitor to prevent metals leaching into drinking water from the pipes.
<https://www.dwi.gov.uk/water-treatment-for-corrosion-control/>

The WHO does not set a specific limit for phosphate in drinking water because it is natural (essential nutrient and an unavoidable constituent of food) and added levels are generally considered safe for human consumption. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) has set guidelines for other water quality parameters like turbidity and pH. We have two podcasts available for consumers on our website on both Lead and Chlorine at:

<https://www.dwi.gov.uk/on-tap-dwi-podcasts/> .

Aluminium Sulphate is used as a coagulant to remove impurities in the water. Aluminium has a guideline value of 200 µg/L (micrograms per litre) set by WHO and the background document for the development of this standard can be found at:

<https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/water-sanitation-and-health/chemical-hazards-in-drinking-water/aluminium>

PFAS is not added by the water companies but is a chemical of concern that is being monitored. Further information can be found in our PFAS leaflet on our website:

<https://www.dwi.gov.uk/pfas-and-forever-chemicals/> .

Our guidance to water companies also contains references to health based risk assessments at [DWI PFAS-Guidance Mar 2025.pdf](#)

5. From 2020 to present, provide data and reports for:

- *Heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium, arsenic)*
- *Industrial solvents (e.g. benzene, trichloroethane)*
- *Pesticides (e.g. aldrin, heptachlor)*
- *Trihalomethanes (THMs)*

Also include any communications or internal discussions related to the health risks of the above substances.

The DWI publish annual reports and company data summary reports. They can be found on our website at: <https://www.dwi.gov.uk/what-we-do/annual-report/> for the years you have requested. The report for 2024 is to be published on 10 July.

As the information you have requested is already publicly available and easily accessible to you in another form or format, regulation 6(1)(b) of the EIRs exempts Defra from providing a copy of the information with this response to your request.

For data reports relating to your specific area, this is not held by the DWI and you will need to contact Portsmouth Water directly at <https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/contact-us/>.

Regarding health risks, our drinking water standards are set to be protective of human health and information on our regulations and the background to the standards we follow can be found on our consumer leaflet: <https://www.dwi.gov.uk/drinking-water-standards-and-regulations/>

The DWI has also assembled a group of experts to review and provide recommendations on parameters to ensure drinking water quality in England and Wales remains of the highest standards. Information on this advisory group and their recommendations can be found at: <https://www.dwi.gov.uk/drinking-water-quality-advisory-group/> .

Regulation 12(4)(a)

Regulation 12(4)(a) is a qualified exception, which usually means that a public authority is required to conduct a public interest test to determine whether or not information should be disclosed or withheld. However, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which is the independent regulator for requests made under the EIRs, takes the view that a public interest test in cases where the information is not held would serve no useful purpose.

Therefore, in line with the ICO's view, Defra has not conducted a public interest test in this case.

Information disclosed in response to this EIRs request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

We attach Annex A, explaining the copyright that applies to the information being released to you, and Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

DWI FOIA and EIR team

dwi.enquiries@defra.gov.uk

Annex A

Copyright

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by copyright. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including for private study and non-commercial research, and for any other purpose authorised by an exception in current copyright law. Documents (except photographs or logos) can be also used in the UK without requiring permission for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder.

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Copyright in other documents may rest with a third party. For information about obtaining permission from a third party see the [Intellectual Property Office's website](#).

Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Vanessa Drury, Head of Information Rights via email at InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk and they will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure is on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure.

The ICO can be contacted using the following link:

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/official-information-concerns-report/official-information-concern/>