



Providing Safe Drinking Water in America: 2004 National Public Water Systems Compliance Report - Fact Sheet

What is the scope of the report? The report is the ninth in a series (beginning with calendar year 1996) of annual reports from EPA. The National Public Water System Compliance Report for 2004 describes how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its state and tribal partners are meeting the goal of ensuring that Americans receive safe drinking water from public water systems (PWS). The report also discusses the data we use to measure our success and the progress we are making in our efforts to increase its reliability and completeness.

Additionally, the report summarizes PWS compliance in Indian country, including violations on Indian reservations, EPA's enforcement and compliance assistance activities with respect to Tribal PWS, and the financial assistance EPA has provided to facilitate the provision of safe drinking water to Tribes. Appendix B of the report summarizes, in table format, the annual reports that each State must prepare discussing drinking water violations at PWS in their jurisdictions.

Who are the potential users of the report? The target audiences for the report are State and EPA drinking water regulators and environmental professionals. Others who may find value in this report include anyone else who may be interested in a summary of PWS compliance.

PWS COMPLIANCE

The report concludes that most Americans received drinking water from public water systems that recorded no significant violations in 2004. Ninety-four percent of America's public water systems reported no violations of a health-based drinking water standard, and 76% of the populations served by public water systems received drinking water from public water systems with no reported significant violations in 2004.

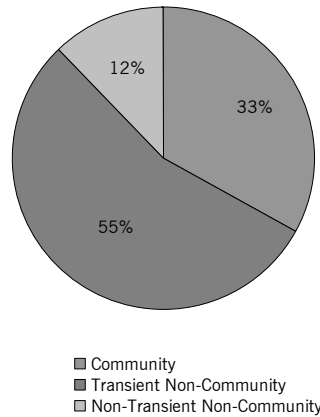
This report uses information from the Federal Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS/FED), the national database in which EPA records information the states are required to report on PWS compliance. For the national public water system compliance reports, EPA examines SDWIS/FED records of violations of primary drinking water regulations that specify: 1) the maximum permissible level of a contaminant in water that is delivered to any user of a public water system (Maximum Contaminant Level or MCL); 2) techniques for treating water to

make it safe; 3) monitoring and reporting requirements (how and when water must be tested and the results reported); and 4) significant user notification violations.¹ While SDWIS/FED collects information on monitoring and reporting violations, only “significant” monitoring and reporting violations are counted in this report. A “significant” monitoring and reporting violation occurs, with rare exceptions, when no samples are taken or no results are reported during a compliance period.

Findings for National Summary

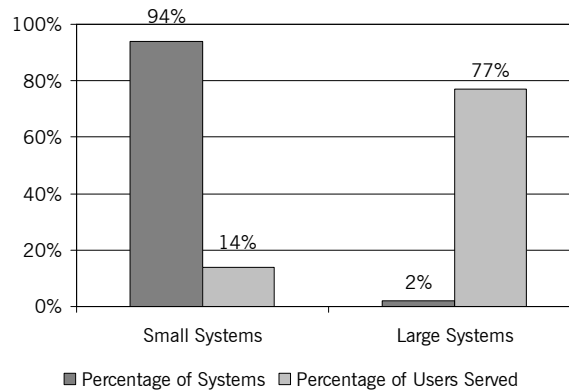
- In 2004, 158,802 public water systems together served over 296 million users. The actual number of individuals served was smaller, because millions of Americans drank water from, and were counted as users by, more than one public water system during the course of the year.

Percentage of Systems by Type



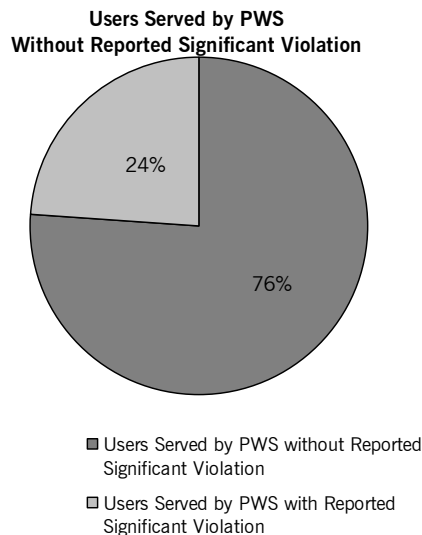
- Most public water systems were small, but large systems served a majority of the people who drank water from a public water system.

Size vs. Users Served



¹ This report tabulates only “significant” monitoring and reporting and notification (e.g., CCR) violations. Table A-1 of the National Public Water System Compliance Report presents descriptions of significant monitoring violations for the different drinking water regulations.

- The primacy states reported either a health-based violation, a significant monitoring and reporting violation, or a significant CCR violation at 41,310 public water systems in 2004.
- The vast majority of the 132,573 violations (there may be more than one violation at each noncomplying system) the states reported to SDWIS/FED in 2004 were for a public water system's significant failure to monitor and report, rather than health-based MCL or treatment technique violations detected and reported by a system.
- 94% of America's public water systems reported no violations of a health-based drinking water standard in 2004. The Maximum Contaminant Level for the Total Coliform Rule (TCR) is the health-based standard most frequently violated.
- 76% of the population served by public water systems received drinking water from a system that reported no violations of a health-based standard, was not cited for a significant violation of a monitoring and reporting requirement, and issued a consumer confidence report, if required.



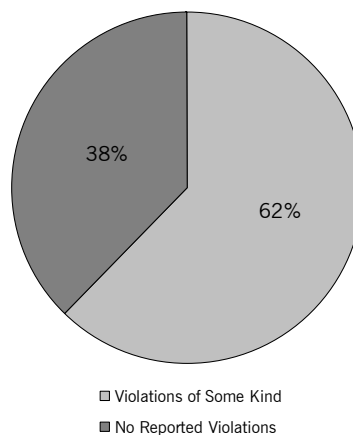
- 87% of community water systems complied with the Consumer Confidence Report Rule.
- One violation of a variance or exemption was reported to SDWIS/FED during 2004.
- EPA designated 16,688 PWS as significant noncompliers. Over 90% of these systems served fewer than 3,300 users. During the 2004 calendar year, States and EPA addressed 4,392 significant noncompliers (SNCs). 36% of the SNCs addressed were newly identified SNCs in 2004.
- Approximately 22,500 (21%) out of over 106,000 non-community water systems had significant violations.

- Fifty-two (21%) out of 248 larger non-community water systems serving more than 3,300 users had significant violations. Together these 52 non-community systems served only about 464,000 (1.9%) users of the 24 million users served by non-community water systems.
- Approximately 18,700 (36%) out of the over 52,000 community water systems had significant violations. Of the 272 million users served in their primary residence by community water systems, approximately 69 million received their water from one of the violating community water systems.
- Approximately 2,100 (25%) of the more than 8,600 larger community water systems serving more than 3,300 users had significant violations. These violating larger community systems served more than 61 million (22%) of the 272 million users served in their primary residence by community water systems.
- Of the approximately 44,000 community water systems serving 3,300 users or less in their primary residence, over 16,600 (38%) had significant violations. Over 7.8 million users were served by these small community water systems.

Findings for Indian Country

- In 2004, 818 public water systems in Indian country served 681,541 users.
- 95% of the public water public water systems in Indian country were small (serving less than 3,300 users).
- 508 of the 818 PWS had health-based or significant reporting violations.

Systems with Reported Significant Violations



- 89% of public water systems in Indian country reported no violations of a health-based drinking water standard in 2004.

- 89% of violations reported in 2004 were for a public water system's significant failure to monitor and report, rather than for a health-based MCL or a treatment technique violation detected and reported.
- 59% of tribal community water systems complied with the Consumer Confidence Report Rule.

Data Quality

The data used in this report came from EPA's national SDWIS/FED database. SDWIS/FED is composed of data that primacy states are required to submit to SDWIS/FED each quarter. EPA periodically conducts data verifications (independent, on-site audits) of primacy state and tribal drinking water programs to ensure that the primacy state is determining compliance in accordance with Federal regulations. EPA's review showed that the quality of the information the states reported to SDWIS/FED is improving, but the data are incomplete. This finding principally reflects differences between state and EPA regulatory interpretation rather than a preponderance of data management issues.

EPA's analysis of the data verifications found:

- 95% of all inventory data in SDWIS/FED was accurate and complete.
- Most of the discrepancies between apparent and reported violations are because of unrecorded and unreported violations. This accounts for 62% of all discrepancies related to maximum contaminant level/treatment technique violations and 86% of all discrepancies related to monitoring and reporting violations.
- Only 27% of apparent monitoring and reporting violations had been reported to SDWIS/FED.
- 65% of the apparent MCL/treatment technique violations had been reported to SDWIS/FED.
- SDWIS/FED contained accurate and complete information on 82% of the enforcement actions found in the states' records.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Most Americans received water from systems which reported no violations of health-based standards, and for which the states reported no significant violations of monitoring and reporting requirements.

States and EPA should continue working together to address significant violations of monitoring and reporting and notification requirements.

States and EPA should continue working together to address violations of MCL and treatment technique requirements.

EPA continues to work with its state partners to identify and resolve any problems that may have produced data discrepancies in the past and to ensure that complete and accurate documentation is available to help assess the safety of the nation's drinking water. The following steps have been recommended:

- The drinking water violation data has shown improvements from the 1996-1998 timeframe to the 1999-2001 timeframe. EPA is drafting the current Data Reliability Report for the 2002-2004 timeframe. EPA has set a goal of 90% for data quality and is working closely with the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA) to implement an action plan that will help the drinking water program achieve this goal.
- The workgroup comprised of EPA and ASDWA should continue its efforts to implement its updated 2003 Data Reliability Analysis and Action Plan (DRAAP). Implementation of the plan will begin in 2005.
- Using the 2003 DRAAP, EPA should continue to encourage states through negotiated grant conditions to follow quality assurance/quality control plans for drinking water violation data reported to EPA and address the differences in interpretation of the regulation.
- EPA should work with all states to implement the Agency Quality Management Order.
- EPA should continue efforts to modernize the SDWIS database to reduce data quality problems from data entry to transmission in the future. SDWIS Modernization focused on changes to make the quality checking function available to states before they send data to EPA. Currently this quality checking function is only available to EPA at the receiving end.

Where is the report available?

Electronic: An electronic version of the report is available on EPA's website containing compliance data and other information about Local Government Services and Operations: <http://cfpub.epa.gov/Compliance/resources/reports/accomplishments/sdwa/>

Paper Copy: A limited number of hard copies of the report are available from the National Service Center for Environmental Publications (NSCEP) located in Cincinnati, Ohio. The report (Document Number: EPA 305-R-06-001) can be ordered online at <http://www.epa.gov/ncepihom/index.htm> or by calling (800) 490-9198.