

Recycled water – Public health incident - Notification and response

Information sheet – Recycled water

Background

The Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling (AGWR) (2006) identifies the development and implementation of incident notification and response protocols as a priority. Recycled water incident notification and response protocols are key to ensuring the continued protection of public and environmental health if preventative measures fail.

What is a recycled water public health incident?

Recycled water quality is to be fit for purpose. A recycled water incident occurs when person/s may be exposed to inadequately treated recycled water, or recycled water is not used as intended.

Recycled water incidents may include:

- Recycled water delivered to customers below the specified quality (Critical Control Point breaches)
- Non-compliance with health related water quality objectives (microbiological monitoring results)
- Suspected or identified cross connections with drinking water systems
- Customer or community health complaint concerning recycled water quality
- Post treatment contamination of recycled water
- Use of water for a purpose not authorised or intended.

Developing a recycled water incident notification and response protocol

An incident notification and response protocol should be developed in consultation with the DoH Public Health Directorate.

The protocol should define potential incidents that are specific to the recycled water system and include sufficient detail to determine an incident. This may include treatment information such as the critical control point critical limits, health related water quality objectives such as microbiological criteria and end use information.

The roles, responsibilities and contact details of all involved parties need to be clearly defined and kept up to date. Incident notification to the DoH Public Health Directorate should occur immediately.

The protocol should consider response actions such as conducting an investigation, recycled water supply shutdown, switch to potable water (if available), and community notification. Align the protocol with other notification and incident response protocols such as those required by other government agencies (i.e. EPA) and drinking water incident protocols in the drinking water management system if relevant. A debrief process should be included in the protocol.

Training and Review

All relevant employees should be trained to use the incident notification and response protocol. This may include conducting regular exercises to test the protocol.

The protocol may require more frequent updating than the whole recycled water management system. The protocol should be reviewed regularly – at least annually or updated when there are any relevant staff or system changes.

References

Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling (2006)

For more information

Contact Department of Health – Public Health Directorate by calling (08) 8922 7152 or email wastewater@nt.gov.au

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