

Dear [REDACTED]

EIR Reference: EIR/ID/341

Thank you for your request environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

Under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004, I am requesting information regarding water quality monitoring and contaminant exceedances within your water supply area. Specifically, I request the following information for the period January 2020 – Present:

Contaminants Exceeding Legal Safety Limits

- A list of any instances where contaminants exceeded legal safety thresholds, including but not limited to:*
 - Heavy metals (e.g., lead, arsenic, mercury)*
 - PFAS chemicals*
 - Pesticides and agricultural runoff*
 - Pharmaceuticals and microplastics*
- For each exceedance, please provide:*
 - The date of detection*
 - The affected region(s)*
 - The level recorded vs. the legal limit*

Reports to UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

- Have you reported any contamination incidents to UKHSA under the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016?*
- If so, please provide:*
 - A summary of reports submitted*
 - Any risk assessments conducted before or after reporting to UKHSA*

Remedial Actions & Enforcement

- What corrective actions were taken following any identified exceedances?*
- Have any regulatory enforcement actions, penalties, or improvement notices been issued to your company regarding water quality breaches since 2020?*

With respect to instances where there have been exceedances of the legal limits in drinking water, our response is below.

You requested a list of any instances where contaminants exceeded legal safety thresholds, including but not limited to:

- Heavy metals (e.g., lead, arsenic, mercury)
- PFAS chemicals
- Pesticides and agricultural runoff
- Pharmaceuticals and microplastics

You also requested we provided the following for each exceedance:

- The date of detection
- The affected region(s)
- The level recorded vs. the legal limit

Please allow me to explain how we have interpreted your request for information and have subsequently responded. Water companies collect samples daily from, but not limited to, water treatment works (WTW), service reservoirs (SRs) and customer properties. Samples are analysed in a laboratory to confirm that the water quality meets requirements in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016. Within these regulations, there is a list of parameters which companies must monitor for, where the monitoring should occur (e.g. at a WTW) and the maximum level which is acceptable in drinking water. These levels are known as a Prescribed Concentration Value (PCV) or, more simply, the 'regulatory standard' or 'legal limit'. It is this value we have used to determine how many occasions there have been any exceedances of the 'legal safety threshold'. It is worthy to note that PCVs are set based on several factors and most exceedances of the regulatory standard would not be considered a risk to health.

A full list of the parameters that water companies must monitor for, including PCVs, can be found on the Drinking Water Inspectorate's website by following this link: [Drinking Water Standards and Regulations - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

Where there is an exceedance of the regulatory standard, a full source to tap investigation is carried out including, but not limited to, obtaining resamples from appropriate locations, onsite investigations by field staff and carrying out a review of water quality and online data. Where a root cause is identified, action is taken to rectify the issue and customers are advised how to prevent an occurrence where the cause is related to customer owned assets.

Heavy Metals

Please find a summary of heavy metal exceedances between 2020 and 2024.

Lead: Between 2020 and 2024 we took 9289 regulatory samples which were analysed for lead. There were 21 exceedances of the regulatory standard for lead (10ug/l), all of which were at customer properties. Of these 21 exceedances, 16 were associated with lead pipework supplying the property. Investigations for the other 5 exceedances were unable to determine a root cause for the lead exceedance but it is likely to be associated with the presence of lead solder within the internal plumbing of the property.

Nickel: Between 2020 and 2024 we took 9278 regulatory samples which were analysed for nickel. There were 14 exceedances of the regulatory standard for nickel (20ug/l), all of which were at customer properties. Of the 14 exceedances, the majority were associated with the customer's tap at the property.

There have been no exceedances of the regulatory standard for arsenic or mercury.

The date of detection, the affected region and the level recorded versus the legal limit for the above exceedances are included in the spreadsheet which accompanies this response titled '**Water**

Contaminants and Regulatory Actions Data’. It should be noted that with both lead and nickel, the exceedance is generally associated with the supply to the individual property that was sampled and is not representative of the supply to the wider water distribution area.

PFAS chemicals

Please note that there is no regulatory standard for PFAS compounds. United Utilities does monitor for PFAS compounds as per guidance issued by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Since 2022, when we commenced monitoring for PFAS compounds, we can confirm that there have been no detections in the final water that are greater than 0.1 ug/l.

Pesticides and agricultural runoff

We can confirm that between 2020 and 2024 there has been a single occasion where the concentration of an individual pesticide exceeded the prescribed concentration value of 0.1ug/l.

Propyzamide was detected in a single sample taken from a WTW on 07 February 2024 at a concentration of 0.153ug/l. In response, a full investigation was carried out, including comprehensive resampling at the WTW and within the distribution network. All resample results were below the regulatory limit. The investigations identified that the detection related to recent use of propyzamide on the water catchment land surrounding the raw water source supplying the WTW, following heavy rainfall. The propyzamide had been used by a third party and we engaged with landowners and others on the catchment to ensure that appropriate steps were taken to prevent any future recurrence.

The date of detection, the affected region and the level recorded versus the legal limit for the exceedance is included in the spreadsheet which accompanies this response titled **‘Water Contaminants and Regulatory Actions Data’.**

Pharmaceuticals and microplastics

We do not test for pharmaceuticals and microplastics in the water supply. Please refer to the following links for information on research into microplastics by the drinking water quality regulator, the Drinking Water Inspectorate: <https://www.dwi.gov.uk/research/completed-research/drinking-water-treatment/research-on-removal-of-microplastics-by-drinking-water-treatment-processes/>

You requested details on any reported contamination incidents to UKHSA under the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016. You also requested we provided a summary of reports submitted and any risk assessments conducted before or after reporting to UKHSA.

As stated in Regulation 35(6) of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 and the Water Industry (Suppliers’ Information) Direction 2024, water companies are required to report drinking water quality events that are likely to give rise to a significant risk to health to the Drinking Water Inspectorate and every appropriate local authority and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

At United Utilities we take a risk-based approach, based upon the outputs of a public health risk assessment carried out in response to all water quality events. A public health risk assessment is informed by available sample results, information from customers, onsite investigations carried out by field staff and online water quality trends, where appropriate.

Most water quality events experienced by water companies do not pose a risk to public health, but where there is a concern, we may issue precautionary restriction of use advice to customers, even if we haven’t had confirmation that the water supply is contaminated. We do this to protect our customers whilst further investigations are carried out. The most common situations that result in

notifications to the UKHSA relate to contamination of the customer's private supply pipework with petrochemicals (e.g. due to a spill of central heating oil in the vicinity of the property or supply pipework which is owned by the customer).

There are three types of precautionary Restriction of Use advice and are based upon the public health risk assessment. The three types of advice are included in the below table.

Type of Advice	Explanation
Do Not Use	Customers are advised, as a precautionary measure, not to use their tap water for: drinking, cooking, preparing food, cleaning teeth, showering, bathing, or washing wounds. They can still use water for flushing toilets.
Do Not Drink	Customers are advised, as a precautionary measure, not to use their tap water for: drinking, cooking, preparing food, cleaning teeth, or washing wounds. They can still use water for flushing toilets and bathing.
Boil Water	Customers are advised, as a precautionary measure, to boil their tap water and let it cool before using it for: drinking, cooking, preparing food, cleaning teeth, or washing wounds until further notice. The water can be used as normal for flushing toilets and bathing.

On each occasion where the UKHSA is notified of a water quality event the following information is shared:

- What is the issue
- What is the likely cause for the issue (if known)
- Actions the company are taking to investigate and/or rectify the issue
- The results of any water quality samples
- An assessment of the public health risk
- Any advice provided to customers, including if precautionary restriction of use advice has been issued

Public health risk assessments are kept under constant review during a water quality event and updates shared with the UKHSA where required and appropriate.

In the attached spreadsheet we have provided a summary of the situations where we have had discussions with the UKHSA because there was potential of a contaminant being present, or evidence that a contaminant was present, which is not normally present in the water supply. In these circumstances, advice was issued to the relevant customers, the majority of time, on a precautionary basis whilst additional investigations were carried out, or where we supported the customer to resolve issues with their internal plumbing.

Between 2020 and 2024 United Utilities notified 69 water quality events to the UKHSA where available information indicated a potential risk to health and therefore precautionary advice issued to customers. Of the 69 events, 56 were identified as a private issue, associated with the customer's private pipework or activities. The vast majority of these events are associated with a single property or a handful of properties.

A summary of the reported incidents to UKHSA under the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 is included in the spreadsheet which accompanies this response titled 'Water Contaminants and Regulatory Actions Data'.

You requested information with respect to remedial actions and enforcement. You requested we

provide information on what corrective actions were taken following any identified exceedances and whether we have been issued with any regulatory enforcement actions, penalties, or improvement notices due to water quality breaches since 2020?

As confirmed above, on receipt of any notification of an exceedance of the regulatory standard, a full source to tap investigation is carried out, which includes, but is not limited to:

- Resamples at appropriate points including raw water sources, WTWs, SRs and customer properties
- Onsite investigations at company assets including the catchment and raw water sources.
- Field staff carrying out investigations at customer properties
- Review of online trends
- Review of historic water quality results
- Review of customer contacts

On confirmation of the root cause of an exceedance, corrective action is taken to prevent an occurrence. Where this occurs at a company asset, there are a range of possible responses including remedial action, removal of a company asset from supply, or altering the operation of a company asset or the distribution network. Where an exceedance is due to customer private pipework or tap, we provide customers with the appropriate advice to prevent a reoccurrence or mitigate the water quality risk e.g. replacing any lead pipework supplying the property.

Information with respect to enforcement and improvement notices issued to United Utilities can be found on the Drinking Water Inspectorate's website by following this link: [Improvement programmes - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#).

We hope that this response answers your request. However, if you're not satisfied with how we've handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [REDACTED], and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.

Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Kind regards