Providing Safe Drinking Water in America: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Publishes 2023 National Public Water Systems Compliance Report



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07/01/2026

The United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") released on June 15th its most recent report on national public water system violation data titled:

Providing Safe Drinking Water in America: 2023 National Public Water Systems Compliance Report ("Report").

EPA publishes the Report annually summarizing public water system violation data on the Drinking Water Dashboard.

The Report is published annually as required by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act ("SDWA"). It is required to summarize and evaluate violations of SDWA National Primary Drinking Water Regulations by public water systems. Required information also includes:

- EPA enforcement and compliance assistance activities.
- Recommendations concerning the resources needed for improving compliance.

EPA identifies as highlights in the Report the following:

- During calendar year 2023, the number of active PWSs in the U.S. was 148,541.
- Seventy-two percent (107,559) of the PWSs active in that year had no reported violations of drinking water standards.
- Nearly twenty-eight percent (40,982) were reported to have violated at least one drinking water standard in 2023.
- Four percent (6,045) of the PWSs in the U.S. were reported to have violated a health-based drinking water standard (a contaminant was detected in excess of allowable limits or drinking water treatment technique requirements were not met) in 2023.
- Twenty percent (29,703) of PWSs failed to meet at least one monitoring or reporting requirement, with the result that information about what contaminants were present in their drinking water was late, incomplete, or not reported at all.
- EPA prioritizes SDWA enforcement responses using a methodology that assigns points to violation types (e.g. health-based, monitoring, or reporting) based on the seriousness and duration of the violation. The violation points for each PWS are added together to produce a total score. A PWS with

a score of 11 or higher is designated an enforcement priority until its violations are either returned to compliance or addressed with a formal enforcement action. In 2023, 5,018 (3.4%) PWSs were an enforcement priority in at least one quarter of the year. Systems typically become enforcement priorities after multiple violations over a sustained period. The majority (4,667 or 93%) of PWSs in enforcement priority status were small systems serving a population of 3,300 or less.

- In 2023, EPA and other primacy agencies initiated at least one formal enforcement action at 2,398 PWSs and at least one informal enforcement action at 27,149 PWSs in response to the reported drinking water violations at 40,982 of PWSs within their jurisdictions.
- In 2023, 24,819 PWSs corrected their violations and were reported as returned to compliance.
- The 2023 report data may differ somewhat from 2023 state reports that draw from the Safe Drinking Water Information System-Federal, depending on the specific queries used to generate each annual report.

The Arkansas Department of Health is the primacy agency in Arkansas for administering the SDWA.

A copy of the Report can be found here.