

City of Bellingham Drinking Water Quality Monitoring



The City of Bellingham Water Quality Laboratory is part of the Public Works Operations Division. Bellingham's Operations Division has a qualified staff of water and wastewater utility professionals who understand the importance a clean water supply and healthy environment play in the overall quality of life for the community. They are dedicated to providing customers with the best quality water possible and the city's water quality laboratory plays an essential role in this process.

The primary function of the city's water quality labs is to provide city staff and citizens with the high quality data they need to ensure the safety of the water supply, make informed decisions, and maintain regulatory compliance for drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, environmental resources, and air quality.

Laboratory accreditation

The lab is accredited by the Washington Department of Ecology to perform analyses under the regulations administered by the state of Washington and the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Laboratory staff are experienced in a wide range of sampling and testing methods. Each laboratory analyst has at minimum a four-year degree in the sciences, and all staff members have years of experience with laboratory and field testing in government and private sector laboratories.



All testing is done using approved methods of analysis. Procedures are documented through Standard Operating Procedures and the Laboratory's Quality Assurance Plan. Our laboratory is open to state inspectors who review the methods, data and the qualifications of the staff. The laboratory participates in national performance evaluation studies, where the results on an unknown sample are matched up against water quality labs from all over the country.

Laboratory and treatment plant staff work 7-days a week. State requirements are such that the drinking water must be tested every day. For water quality questions or concerns call 778-7870.

Table of common drinking water quality parameters

Washington tap water is regulated by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Frequent and thorough testing is required to maintain the highest standards.

Notable water quality values in water sampled from distribution system:	pH	Free Chlorine (parts per million)	Hardness (mg/L CaCO ₃)	Total Coliform Bacteria (#/100 ml)	Iron (mg/L)
System Average:	8.32	0.26	23.5	0	0.01
Comments:	Bellingham's source water is pure and as such can be corrosive to plumbing. The pH is adjusted with soda ash to decrease the corrosiveness of the water.	We are required to leave a detectable residual of free chlorine throughout our distribution system to make sure the water is free of pathogens.	Dishwasher manufacturers often refer to this as "grains of hardness". Bellingham's water has slightly more than 1 grain of harness, therefore we recommend as little soap possible.	We are allowed a 5% occurrence of these non-pathogenic bacteria.	Iron can leach from cast iron pipes in the water distribution system.

While staff tests the water every day, customer feedback is welcome. [Water Quality Frequently Asked Questions \(PDF\)](#) may help answer common drinking water questions:

When customers call the lab with a request or complaint about their drinking water there are several questions the laboratory staff may ask in order to determine what actions are needed:

- Detail of problem. If it is an off-taste or odor, describe the taste
- Duration of the problem
- Noticeable in both the hot and cold water
- Noticeable at all water taps inside and outside
- Are neighboring households experiencing the same problem
- Are there water treatment devices in the home
- Has there been a long period of non-use
- What is the temperature setting on the water heater

The city is responsible for water quality only to the point where it enters the property. From the property line throughout the home, apartment or office, water quality is often affected by internal plumbing. If the problem is inside the home and not at neighboring houses, customers may still contact the water quality lab for help troubleshooting the source of the problem.

The quality of Bellingham's drinking water

The [Consumer Confidence Report \(CCR\) \(PDF\)](#) is a requirement of the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Consumer Confidence Report details the substances detected in the city's drinking water. The CCR is mailed to Bellingham water customers every year in June. Staff attempts to make this report understandable, however, drinking water quality information is complex and often technical. Customers with questions are urged to contact the laboratory for assistance.

Bellingham's water is tested regularly for contaminants. If harmful substances are ever found, the drinking water staff is required to report it to the public within 24 hours.

Keeping your drinking water safe

Customers can play a vital role in making sure water reservoirs and pump stations located throughout the city remain safe by calling 778-7700, or after hours at 778-7705, to report suspicious activities around our water distribution system components. Be prepared to provide details including license plate numbers and descriptions of any individuals observed.

The quality of treated wastewater

The City of Bellingham has a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (NPDES) and testing is done every day to show that water the city discharges into Bellingham Bay meets all permit requirements. A copy of the city's [NPDES permit](#) can be found on the city's website.