

MANGANESE, IRON & OTHER “SECONDARY” CONTAMINANTS IN YOUR DRINKING WATER



CLEAN WATER FOR NORTH CAROLINA

WWW.CWFNC.ORG
Durham Office: 919-401-9600
Asheville Office: 828-251-1291

The Problem

North Carolina has many rural community water systems that rely on groundwater, which often contains sediment and naturally occurring minerals, such as iron and manganese. These substances can discolor water and lead to other household problems. Most community water systems in the state that rely on groundwater are privately owned and operated. **Because private, for-profit companies tend to take a bare minimum approach to drinking water quality regulation, nothing is being done about “secondary” water pollution.**



Is This Legal?

The national Safe Drinking Water Act classifies sediment, manganese and iron as “secondary” contaminants. There are **guidelines** for maximum amounts in drinking water, but they are **not enforceable** by law because the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) views these substances as “aesthetic” problems rather than health threats.

EPA does allow states to adopt enforceable standards for these substances, but **North Carolina has not chosen to do so.** The NC Department of Environmental Quality’s Public Water Supply Section requires water service providers to monitor these substances, but they **do not have regulatory authority to penalize providers for secondary contamination of water.**

Even if enforcement was possible, Public Water Supply Section does not have the resources to oversee all of the small systems in the state. Water service providers are typically allowed to conduct and report their own self-monitoring and reporting, meaning it is up to them to report their own violations. **This weak regulatory system does not hold utilities accountable for quality service to customers!**

Cost to Residents

As private water customers battle their way through cases to evaluate rate hikes, such as the current one with Aqua NC, dozens of stories and pictures piece together the reality that having secondary contaminants in your water is more than just an “aesthetic” problem. Dissolved iron gives water a disagreeable metallic taste and appearance. Concentrations as low as 0.3mg/L will leave reddish brown stains on fixtures and laundry that are difficult to remove. Iron can also promote bacteria growth in pipes, which can form a smelly biofilm, clog plumbing, and cause an offensive odor.

Customers are not only paying for undrinkable water, they have **extensive out-of-pocket costs** as well. Many homeowners have to **replace filters and appliances**, which can be a major financial burden. In addition, many customers pay for bottled water to avoid drinking murky, brown, bad-tasting, and unpalatable water.



Tap water of Gaston County resident

The Bottom Line

Water rates should not go up if these problems are not being fixed!

Private, for profit water companies should be transparent about how they are using rate increases to fix problems. Aqua NC justified its 2014 rate case in part to address secondary contaminants — their rate increase was improved, but customers are still burdened with these contaminants over 4 years later!

We need stronger laws to hold water providers accountable for providing clean, clear water—especially for-profit companies such as Aqua NC and Utilities, Inc. The “Regulatory Reform Act of 2011” prohibits North Carolina agencies from adopting regulations that are more stringent than minimum federal regulations — **a repeal of this law would be a major step towards enforceable standards for secondary contaminants.**

IS THIS HAPPENING TO YOU?

If you are having a problem with your water, even if it is not legally enforceable, **report it!** Take and send pictures and other documentation whenever possible.

⇒ **Contact Your State Representative!**

Urge them to repeal the 2011 law and support enforceable limits for secondary contaminants

Call or write them! Find your representatives by visiting:

<https://www2.ncleg.net/RnR/Representation>

⇒ **Call NC Public Water Supply Section!**

Call with unresolved water quality issues; send pictures!

Request a copy of your annual water quality report

1-919-707-9100

<https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/drinking-water>

⇒ **Call the NC Utilities Commission!**

Contact with unresolved questions or complaints about water pricing, notification, or service

1-866-380-9816

<https://www.ncuc.net/>

NC's Privatized Water Woes

Instead of encouraging hookups to existing public water supplies, NC has allowed an abundance of small private systems and water resellers to fill gaps for many years. The sheer number of small water systems became hard to oversee, so the NC Utilities Commission encourages corporate, investor-owned companies to buy up these systems, to reduce regulatory burden and bring needed capital for infrastructure improvements.

Private water companies are able to fully recover the costs of system improvements through high customer rates designed to deliver a certain rate of return on investments. Yet many groundwater systems continue to deliver water that most people would consider “undrinkable,” **despite frequent rate increases.**

There are two major national investor-owned utilities operating in NC: Aqua NC, and Carolina Water Services, along with many smaller private operators. During its current rate hike, Aqua is requesting customers pay a \$70 flat sewer fee, and have an average water bill of \$45. That's over \$110 per month—**much higher than what public water customers pay for water/sewer.** Would YOU pay that much for water too unappetizing to drink?

Contact us!

Clean Water for North Carolina

www.cwfnc.org

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info@cwfnc.org