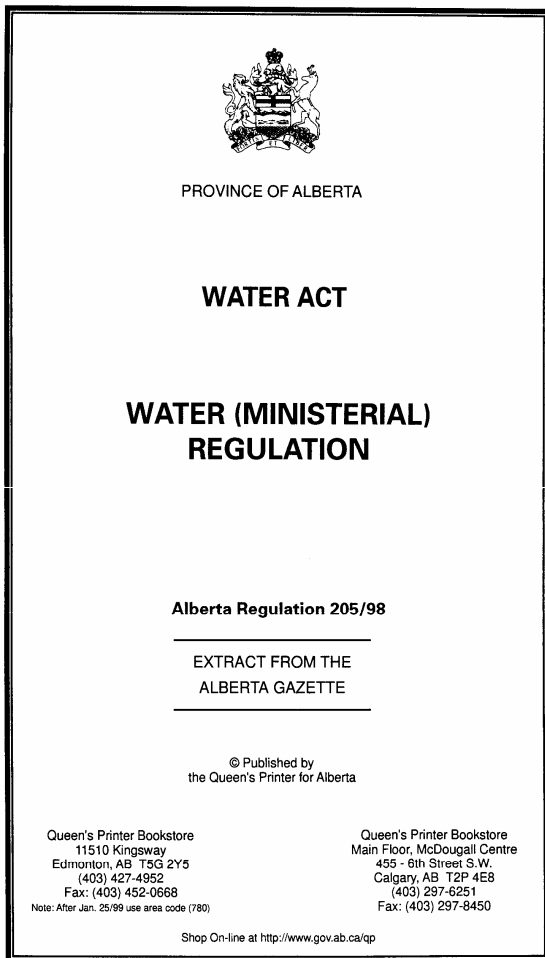


Water Act - Water (Ministerial) Regulation



ALBERTA REGULATION 205/98

Water Act

WATER (MINISTERIAL) REGULATION

Table of Contents

Interpretation	1
Part 1 Activities	
Approval exemption	2
Approval exemptions subject to Code	3
Notice of section 3 activities	4
Part 2 Diversions and Transfers	
Licence exemption	5
Temporary diversions subject to Code	6
Section 6 temporary diversion notices	7
Diversion for household purposes prohibited	8
Subdivisions requiring reports	9
Major river basin boundaries	10
Licence purposes	11
Licence expiry dates	12
Part 3 Notice	
Notice of application, decision or order	13
Exemptions from notice requirements	14
Part 4 Access to Information	
Disclosure of information	15
Provision of information	16
Extension of time	17
Part 5 Land Compensation Board Procedures	
Appeals	18
Notice of appeal	19
Pre-hearing matters	20
Conduct of a hearing and decision	21
Combining hearings	22
Costs	23
Fees	24
Extension of time	25

Chemical Analysis of Farm Water Supplies

Adapted from Agdex 716 (D04) Published April 1991

A routine chemical analysis tests the water for 15 chemical parameters. It will reveal the hardness and iron concentration as well as the presence of other chemicals such as chlorides, sulphates, nitrates and nitrites. Chemicals, other than those listed below, can be tested but arrangements should be made with the lab before the sample is submitted. These special requests' must be clearly specified on the request form. Your farm water supply should be analyzed whenever a new water source is constructed, or when a change in water quality is noticed.

Your local health unit can provide you with the necessary water sample containers. Water samples specifically for human consumption must be submitted to the health unit.

The water sample you take should be representative. Choose an outlet as close to the source as possible. For most domestic samples, allow the water to run through the faucet for about five minutes and then fill the sample container.

Once you have obtained a good water sample, take it to your local health unit for forwarding to the appropriate laboratory. After the laboratory analysis is completed, the health inspector or technologist will receive a copy of the analysis and will be able to help you interpret the results.

Water Quality Criteria

It is not essential for private supplies to meet these guidelines. People have different reactions and tolerances to different minerals. If any chemical in your water exceeds drinking water limits consult your family doctor or local health unit.

All levels listed below (except pH) are listed in parts per million (ppm). Many labs report results in milligrams/Litre (mg/L), which is equivalent to ppm.

Sodium

Sodium is not considered a toxic metal, and 5,000 to 10,000 milligrams per day are consumed by normal adults without adverse effects. The average intake of sodium from water is only a small fraction of that consumed in a normal diet.

Persons suffering from certain medical conditions such as hypertension may require a sodium restricted diet, in which case the intake of sodium from drinking water could become significant. Sodium levels as low as 20 ppm are sometimes a concern to them. A maximum level of 300 (200*) ppm sodium has traditionally been used as a guideline but the "Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality" list no maximum acceptable concentration.

Sodium is a significant factor in assessing water for irrigation and plant watering. High sodium levels affect soil structure and a plant's ability to take up water.

Potassium

Potassium is usually only found in quantities of a few ppm in water. There is no recommended limit for potassium but levels over 2,000 ppm may be harmful to human nervous systems. Alberta water supplies rarely contain more than 20 ppm.

Calcium

Calcium is one cause of "hardness" in water. Calcium is not a hazard to health but is undesirable because it may be detrimental for domestic uses such as washing, bathing and laundering. It also tends to cause encrustations in kettles, coffee makers and water heaters. 200 ppm is often considered an acceptable limit.

Magnesium

Magnesium is another constituent causing "hardness" in water. A suggested limit of 150 ppm is used because of taste considerations.

Iron

Iron levels as low as 0.2 to 0.3 ppm will usually cause the staining of laundry and plumbing fixtures. The presence of iron bacteria in water supplies will often cause these symptoms at even lower levels. Iron gives water a metallic taste that may be objectionable to some persons at one to two ppm. Most water contains less than five ppm iron but occasionally levels over 30 ppm are found. Iron and iron bacteria are not considered a health concern.

Sulphate (SO₄)

Sulphate concentrations over 500 ppm can be laxative to some humans and livestock. Sulphate levels over 500 ppm may be a concern for livestock on marginal intakes of certain trace minerals. Very high levels of sulphates have been associated with some brain disorders in cattle and pigs.

Chloride

Due to taste considerations the suggested maximum level for chloride is 250 ppm. Most water in Alberta contains less than 20 ppm chloride, although chloride in the 2,000 ppm range can be found.

NO₂ Nitrogen (Nitrite)

Due to its toxicity, the maximum acceptable concentration of nitrite in drinking water is one ppm. Nitrite is usually an indicator of very direct contamination by sewage or manure because nitrites are unstable and quickly become nitrates.

The concentration in livestock water should not exceed 10 ppm.

NO₃ Nitrogen (Nitrate)

Nitrates are also an indicator of contamination by human or livestock wastes, excessive fertilization or seepage from dump sites. The maximum acceptable concentration in drinking water is 10 ppm. The figure is based on the potential for the nitrate poisoning of infants. Adults can tolerate higher levels but high nitrate levels may cause irritation of the stomach and bladder. The suggested maximum for livestock use is 1,000 ppm.

Fluoride

Fluorides occur naturally in most well waters and are desirable since they help prevent dental cavities. Between one and 1.5 ppm is desirable. As fluoride levels increase above this amount there is an increase in the tendency to cause tooth mottling.

Fluoride levels less than four ppm are not considered a problem for livestock.

TDS Inorganic (Total Dissolved Solids)

This is a measure of the inorganic minerals dissolved in the water. As a general rule less than 1,000 (500*) ppm TDS is considered satisfactory. Levels higher than this are not necessarily a problem; it depends on the specific minerals present.

The suitability for livestock deteriorates as TDS exceeds the 2,000 to 3,000 ppm range.

Conductivity

Conductivity is measured in micro Siemens per centimetre. It can be used to estimate the total dissolved solids in the water. Multiplying the conductivity by 0.65 will give a good approximation of the total dissolved solids. Conductivity tests are often used to assess water suitability for irrigation.

pH

pH is a measure of how acidic or basic the water is. The pH scale goes from zero (acidic) to 14 (basic) with seven being neutral. The generally accepted range for pH is 6.5 to 8.5 with an upper limit of 9.5.

Hardness

The harder the water is the greater its ability to neutralize soap suds. Hardness is caused primarily by calcium and magnesium, but is expressed as ppm equivalent of calcium carbonate. Hard water causes soap curd which makes bathroom fixtures difficult to keep clean and causes greying of laundry.

Hard water will also tend to form scale in hot water tanks, kettles, piping systems, etc.

Type of Water	Amount of Hardness	of grains per gallon
	ppm	
Soft	0- 50	0-3
Moderately Soft	50 - 100	3-6
Moderately Hard	100 - 200	6-12
Hard	200 - 400	12- 23
Very Hard	400 - 600	23 - 35
Extremely Hard	Over 600	Over 35

Alkalinity

Alkalinity is not a specific substance but rather a combined effect of several substances. It is a measure of the resistance of a water to a change in pH. The alkalinity of most Alberta waters is in the range of 100 - 500 ppm, which is considered acceptable. Water with higher levels is often used. Alkalinity is a factor in corrosion or scale deposition and may affect some livestock when over 1,000 ppm.

Water Treatment

Water treatment equipment can often improve water quality significantly. Each type of water treatment equipment has its limitations and thus should be selected carefully. For more information on water treatment please refer to the Agdex 71 6 D series of fact sheets.

Helpful Conversions

1 ppm (part per million) = 1 mg/L (milligram per litre)

1 gpg (grain per gallon) = 17.1 ppm (parts per million)

References

Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality (1987) Health and Welfare Canada

*Federal-Provincial Subcommittee on Drinking Water of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Committee on Environment and Occupational Health. March 2001. Summary of Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

Additional Information

VIDEOS

Will the Well Go Dry Tomorrow? (Mow-Tech Ltd.: 1-800 GEO WELL)
Water Wells that Last (PFRA – Edmonton Office: 780-495-3307)
Ground Water and the Rural Community (Ontario Ground Water Association)

BOOKLET

Water Wells that Last (PFRA – Edmonton Office: 780-495-3307);
<http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/water/wells/index.html>
Quality Farm Dugouts - <http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/esb/dugout.html>

ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT

WATER - <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water.cfm>

GROUNDWATER INFORMATION SYSTEM - http://www.telusgeomatics.com/tgpub/ag_water/

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