



## water & forestry

Department:  
Water Affairs and Forestry  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: QUESTION 119 FOR WRITTEN REPLY

A draft reply to the above-mentioned question asked by Ms A T Lovemore (DA), is attached for your consideration, please.

DIRECTOR-GENERAL

DATE: 03/07/09

DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED

MS B P SONJICA MP  
MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

DATE: 14.07.2009

## NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLYQUESTION NO 119

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 12 JUNE 2009  
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 2)

**119. Ms A T Lovemore (DA) to ask the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs:**

- (1) Whether, with reference to a certain report her department has stipulated deadlines for the provision of safe drinking water where it is not currently provided; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (2) whether her department is assisting any municipalities that are facing challenges in delivering safe drinking water; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (3) (a) for how long have the levels of (i) trihalomethanes and (ii) aluminium in the drinking water supplied by a certain municipality exceeded safe limits and (b) what are the health implications thereof;
- (4) whether, with reference to the stated aim of initiating transparency on the actual drinking water quality performance, drinking water quality results will in future be freely available to water consumers; if not, why not; if so, how will the results be made available?

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**REPLY:**

- (1) The Blue Drop Report as published in May 2009 gives the performance of all municipalities against a number of criteria monitoring management of drinking water services, one of these is compliance against SANS 241. The national norms and standards as gazetted in 2001 already compel municipalities to comply with SANS 241.
- (2) The Regional Offices in the respective provinces are providing support and guidance to the identified municipalities that are capacity-challenged to ensure that improvement of drinking water quality management is ensured soonest. This support ranges from water quality monitoring-support in Limpopo, funding support (in liaison with Amatola Water) in the Eastern Cape, to support to the Ikwezi Municipality with the objective of water treatment optimization. This denotes that the support ranges from human resource assistance to capital funding.
- (3) Trihalomethane (THM's) is sometimes a by-product of the disinfectant process when chlorine is used for disinfection and the final water contains organic compounds. THM levels that exceeded the South African National Standard were recorded in the western portion of the Port Elizabeth water supply as from July 2008 to March 2009. The levels of exceeding fluctuated over this period depending on the

organic content (high turbidity) and pH levels of the resource water. These factors contributed to the development of this disinfectant by-product. Even though this situation has improved to acceptable levels over the last few months, it is noted that infrastructural refurbishment is required to ensure greater sustainability of the process.

The health implications of THM's are a controversial topic and will vary but will always depend on the consumption volumes over longer periods by individuals in the affected communities. Tests performed on animals by scientists affiliated to the World Health Organization (WHO), indicated that continued (extended) exposure to food or water containing THM's could have tumor formation possibilities (the latter depends on various factors such as: weight of the individual, consumption quantities, period of consumption, etc). It must be noted that the same scientists however proposed limits for drinking water which is minuscule in relation to the quantity of similar chemicals generally found in ordinary toothpaste - in other words the health hazard in toothpaste may be higher than that indicated if levels of THM's in drinking water exceeds SANS 241 THM levels. (The proposed limits from the WHO were adopted in the South African National Standard for drinking water and as a safety precautionary measure, a very high safe standard for THM's is enforced.)

Another treatment facility in the water supply network of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro is using Alum dosing as part of its coagulation process (suspended solids removal). It has been identified that this dosing practice in relation to the characteristics of the resource water must be optimized to prevent Aluminum failures in the final water supplied to certain areas within the Port Elizabeth network.

Once again the World Health Organization stipulates that health implications by aluminum exposure in drinking water depends on various factors (similar to those explained for THM's) but in addition to that states in the 2004 Guidelines that the total oral Aluminum exposure through drinking water must be less than 5%. Yet more stringent drinking water quality limits will be applied as a precautionary measure and will be duly enforced by the Department. Extensive exposure to Aluminum is thought to have Alzheimer disease affects (*WHO Guidelines 2004*).

Despite sharing the health risks of extreme and prolonged exposure to these substances in water with you, the Department is not convinced that the marginal exceeding of both THM's and aluminum in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality is proof of any danger to the health of consumers. The Department will however closely monitor the situation and the DWA team was assured by Nelson Mandela Bay Metro that these challenges are being tended to. The system will be audited in August 2009 to authenticate the required improvements.

- (4) The Regulations published by the Minister in 2001 in terms of section 9 of the Water Services Act as compulsory National Standards already legally forces municipalities to notify their consumers should their drinking water not comply with SANS 241. Progressive Blue Drop Certification which introduced incentive-based regulation to the South African water sector has initiated the requirement by all Water Services Institutions to annually report publicly on its actual drinking water quality performance. Thus meaning that as from 2010, Blue Drop status will only be obtained should the responsible institutions adopt a transparent management approach to drinking water quality. Through this internationally distinguished regulation programme, public reporting on drinking water quality has become a regulatory requirement. Lastly it should be noted that the Blue Drop Report is available on the DWAF website as a public document.