Optimizing regulatory frameworks for safe and clean drinking-water.

Regulation aimed at ensuring the safety of drinking-water is a powerful tool to protect human health in developed and developing countries alike. It contributes significantly towards achieving the drinking-water and sanitation target of the Millennium Development Goal 7. Regulation is, however, not always used to its full potential. The enclosed issue sheets provide guidance on how to optimize the use of regulation to protect public health through drinking-water quality management.

The intended audience of these issue sheets consists of drinking-water regulators who want to establish, update or amend their regulatory frameworks. Given the broad scope of regulations with an impact on whether drinking-water is sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable, the guidance will be of use to other regulators whose mandate includes responsibilities with the potential to improve drinking-water quality, as well. These may include environmental, public health and economic regulators.

Key principles

How regulation can be used to protect public health in relation to drinking-water

1. Explicitly link regulations to the protection of public health
2. Implement regulations that facilitate the assessment, prioritization and management of risks to public health
3. Design regulations to address factors influencing the safety of drinking-water from source to consumer using a multiple-barrier approach
4. Base regulations on best practice
5. Use a variety of tools to build and ensure compliance with regulations
6. Create realistic, achievable regulations within national, sub-national, and local contexts
7. Clearly define stakeholder roles and responsibilities in regulations
8. Design regulations to direct information collection, flow and consequential action
9. Design regulations to be adaptable, to reflect changes in contexts, understanding, and technological innovation
10. Ensure regulations are supported

Additional details on this subject can be found in the enclosed issue sheet entitled How regulation can be used to protect public health in relation to drinking-water.
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RegNet Vision and Mission

Drinking-water: Optimizing regulation to protect health was developed in collaboration with members of the WHO-hosted International Network of Drinking-water Regulators (RegNet).

The RegNet vision is to ensure, by 2015, increased awareness in WHO Member States of the need to protect and promote public health through drinking-water quality management, and to have this need reflected in the objectives and essential functions contained in regulatory frameworks.

The RegNet mission is to promote regulatory excellence and continuous improvements of regulatory systems to protect public health as related to drinking-water.

For additional information on RegNet, please refer to www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/dwq/RegNet/en/index.html

Basic definitions

For the purpose of these issue sheets, drinking-water regulators are defined as professionals tasked with ensuring the safety of drinking-water for its quality and protection through setting and/or enforcing standards, norms and best practice regulations and/or independent surveillance at national and sub-national levels.

Unless the context indicates otherwise, the term "regulation" is used generally to refer to the broad range of government instruments that are legally binding, including constitutions, legislation, decrees, acts, by-laws, orders and ordinances.

Regulation will function at all levels of governance and administration (national, intermediate - e.g. state, provincial, regional - and local), in these issue sheets generically captured as "national" unless otherwise stated.