



2025 Public Health Goals Report

Placer County Water Agency

Prepared by PCWA Drinking Water Operations Staff



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Background:

Provisions of the California Health and Safety Code specify that larger (>10,000 service connections) water utilities prepare a special report by July 1, 2025 if their water quality measurements have exceeded any Public Health Goals (PHGs). PHGs are non-enforceable goals established by California EPA's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). PHGs are concentrations of contaminants in drinking water that pose no significant health risk if consumed for a lifetime. As defined in statute, PHGs for non-carcinogenic chemicals in drinking water are set at a concentration "at which no known or anticipated adverse health effects will occur, with an adequate margin of safety." For carcinogens, PHGs are set at a concentration that "does not pose any significant risk to health."

The law also requires that where OEHHA has not adopted a PHG for a constituent, the water suppliers are to use the Maximum Contaminant Level Goals (MCLGs) adopted by USEPA. Only constituents detected above a PHG or MCLG for samples collected between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2024 and which have a California primary drinking water standard are to be addressed.

Included where applicable is the numerical public health risk associated with the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) or treatment technique level and the PHG or MCLG, the category or type of risk to health that could be associated with each constituent, the best treatment technology available that could be used to reduce the constituent level, and an estimate of the cost to install that treatment if it is appropriate and feasible.

What Are PHGs?

PHGs are set by OEHHA and are based solely on public health risk considerations. None of the practical risk-management factors that are considered by USEPA or CDDW in setting drinking water standards (MCLs) are considered in setting the PHGs. These factors include analytical detection capability, treatment technology available, benefits and costs. The PHGs are not enforceable and are not required to be met by any public water system. MCLGs are the federal equivalent to PHGs.

Water Quality Data Considered:

All of the water quality data collected by our water system between 2022 and 2024 for purposes of determining compliance with drinking water standards was considered. This data was all summarized in our 2022, 2023, and 2024 Annual Water Quality Reports, also known as Consumer Confidence Reports, which were made available to all of our customers in the spring of 2023, 2024, and 2025, respectively.

Constituents Detected That Exceed a PHG or a MCLG:

The following is a discussion of constituents that were detected in one or more of our drinking water sources at levels above the PHG, or if no PHG, above the MCLG.

Coliform Bacteria:

In the month of November 2023, we collected 95 samples from our distribution system for coliform analysis. Of these samples, 1 sample was positive for total coliform bacteria, which is equal to about 1%. All follow-up samples for this occurrence were negative for coliform bacteria. Furthermore, the samples which originally tested positive for coliform bacteria tested negative for E. Coli.

The treatment technique trigger level for coliform is 5% positive samples of all samples per month and the MCLG is zero. The reason for the coliform drinking water standard is to minimize the possibility of the water containing pathogens which are organisms that cause waterborne disease. Because coliform is only a surrogate indicator of the potential presence of pathogens, it is not possible to state a specific numerical health risk. While USEPA normally sets MCLGs “at a level where no known or anticipated adverse effects on persons would occur”, they indicate that they cannot do so with coliforms.

Coliform bacteria are an indicator organism that are ubiquitous in nature and are not generally considered harmful. They are used because of the ease in monitoring and analysis. If a positive sample is found, it indicates a potential problem that needs to be investigated and follow up sampling done. It is not at all unusual for a system to have an occasional positive sample. Because positive results are as likely to be the result of wind, rain, sampling or laboratory error as an actual problem with the distribution system, it is difficult, if not impossible to assure that a system will never have a positive sample. Our water quality staff do everything they can to avoid sampling in undesirable weather for this reason, but it is impossible to avoid it at all times.

We add chlorine at our sources to assure that the water served is microbiologically safe. The chlorine residual levels are carefully controlled to provide the best health protection without causing the water to have undesirable taste and odor or increasing the disinfection byproduct level. This careful balance of treatment processes is essential to continue supplying our customers with safe drinking water.

Other equally important measures that we have implemented include: an effective cross-connection control program, maintenance of a disinfectant residual throughout our system, an effective monitoring and surveillance program and maintaining positive pressures in our distribution system.

Best Available Treatment Technology and Cost Estimates:

Both USEPA and CDDW adopt what are known as BATs or Best Available Technologies which are the best known methods of reducing contaminant levels to below the treatment technique level. Costs can be estimated for such technologies; however, since many PHGs and all MCLGs are set much lower than the MCL or treatment technique level, it is not always possible, nor feasible to determine what treatment is needed to further reduce a constituent downward to or near the PHG or MCLG, many of which are set at zero. In some cases, installing treatment to try and further reduce very low levels of one constituent may have adverse effects on other aspects of water quality. In the case of coliform bacteria, additional disinfection would adversely impact the level of disinfection byproducts. Our system has already taken all of the steps described by CDDW as “best available technology” for coliform bacteria in Section 64447, Title 22, CCR. In addition, because there were not positive samples in any follow-up sampling, it is not suspected that there is any defect in our distribution system that contributed to this positive sample.

Recommendations for Further Action:

The drinking water quality of the Placer County Water Agency’s Foothill/Sunset System meets all CDDW and USEPA drinking water standards set to protect public health. There is no further available technology or practice not currently in use which could significantly lower the levels of the contaminants listed in this report. No further action is needed.