

## PH2G: Develop protocols for dealing with consumer water quality complaints

REGULATORY FUNCTION: PUBLIC HEALTH		PH2G
<b>OBJECTIVE PH2</b> Regulatory compliance with water and sanitation safety plans is monitored through collected information on water quality	<b>ACTION CARD PH2G</b> <h1 style="margin: 0;">DEVELOP PROTOCOLS FOR DEALING WITH CONSUMER WATER QUALITY COMPLAINTS</h1>	
<b>COST:</b> Medium <b>FREQUENCY:</b> One time <b>TARGET GROUPS:</b> Regulators, laboratories, service operators, ministries of health, consumer associations		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b> Regulators develop protocols for investigating and dealing with consumer water quality complaints, through to satisfactory resolution. Regulators are increasingly performing this task through online platforms or by phone, where consumers are invited to submit their complaints and follow up with regulators on appropriate resolutions and potential compensation. Interactive digital mechanisms could be developed along with similar kinds of platforms that already exist within national health authorities. Either way, regulators analyse complaints and respond to them, in coordination with health authorities. Complaint mechanisms must clearly outline the steps and procedure accessible to all interested parties.		
<b>EXPECTED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dangerous impacts on public health are prevented.</li> <li>• Service operators are corrected when regulatory requirements are not met.</li> </ul>		
<b>EXAMPLE: UNITED KINGDOM</b> In the <b>UK</b> , consumers contact the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) if they have concerns about drinking water quality, or they are not satisfied with how their water supplier has dealt with their concerns. The DWI has a duty to investigate these matters, and complaints are logged and investigated by an inspector. If consumers contact the DWI with a concern about their tap water quality and they have not contacted their own water supplier, the DWI will refer them to their water supplier. As the regulator for drinking water quality in England and Wales, the DWI has a duty to investigate consumer complaints about public water supplies, where the water is used for human consumption as defined in drinking water quality regulations. The following steps are undertaken after receiving complaints. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Inspectorate will send an email from the DWI Enquiries mailbox to the supplying water company's nominated day-to-day contact with the reference number for the complaint, requesting a full report on the company's communications with the consumer and its investigation into the matter.</li> <li>• Companies should provide a similarly password-protected report to DWI.Enquiries@defra.gov.uk within 10 working days of the date of the email. The Inspectorate will acknowledge receipt by email.</li> <li>• Following receipt of the water supplier's report, the Inspectorate will assess the supplier's investigation of the consumer's concern. The role of the Inspectorate is to assess the water supplier's actions and investigation with regard to the complaint to determine if it has met the requirements of the Regulations.</li> <li>• If the Inspectorate is satisfied with the supplier's investigation into the consumer's concern, the Inspectorate will write to the consumer to explain the outcome of the investigation, and advise the consumer on any further actions they should take to help address their concern (for example, replacement of the private supply pipe). A password-protected PDF copy of the letter will be sent to the supplier's day to day contact for the company's records.</li> <li>• If the Inspectorate concludes that the supplier has not fully complied with the requirements of the Regulations and/or their duties under the Act, the Inspector will write to the board level contact of the supplier, and will make recommendations or initiate further enforcement as deemed necessary, in accordance with the Inspectorate's published</li> </ul>		

Enforcement Policy. These letters will not normally be copied to the consumer unless the consumer submits a request under the Freedom of Information Act, in which case a redacted version protecting individuals' identity may be provided.

- If the Inspectorate makes any recommendations or proceeds to further enforcement, the consumer will be informed in the Inspectorate's final letter to the consumer.

### **LINKS**

UK Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI): <https://cdn.dwi.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/03135403/Guidance-on-Consumer-Complaints-Version-1.1.pdf>

### **INTERNAL CAPACITIES NEEDED AND THE ROLE OF PARTNERS**

Developing protocols for dealing with consumer water quality complaints requires technical capacity to understand the relative seriousness and implications of specific complaint types. This understanding will allow the development of protocols with different complaint classifications of, which can allow for nuanced responses within protocols. Administrative and IT capacity is also required for establishing and administering of a phone line, email address and database. Development partners can provide targeted technical and administrative support to regulators when they are developing protocols.