

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Program](#)

What Is the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Regulation?

UCMR is a tool for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to find unregulated contaminants of concern in the nation's drinking water. The Safe Drinking Water Act gives EPA the responsibility to protect public health and to set minimum standards for drinking water. To do this, EPA identifies contaminants that might be harmful to human health. (A contaminant is any physical, chemical, biological, or radiological substance or matter in water.) EPA then determines whether to set drinking water standards for individual contaminants or to require water providers to use certain treatment processes to reduce or eliminate contaminants in the drinking water.

As a part of this process, EPA works with local water systems to periodically test the water that is delivered to consumers' homes for contaminants that are not regulated. This helps EPA to know whether these contaminants occur often enough and at high enough levels to warrant further attention. This testing takes place as part of the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Regulation, or UCMR. EPA is currently implementing the second cycle of UCMR testing (with monitoring taking place from 2008-2010), called UCMR2.

Which Water Systems Participate in UCMR2?

EPA requires all public water systems serving more than 10,000 people to participate. EPA also requires some smaller systems serving 10,000 people or fewer to participate. EPA selects smaller systems based on factors such as the number of people they serve, where they are located, and whether they use water from a source such as a river or a well. Together, these water systems gather the information EPA needs to determine if and how often these contaminants occur in drinking water. Almost 5,000 systems are participating in UCMR2.

What Contaminants Are Systems Looking for as Part of UCMR2?

EPA considered more than 200 contaminants for further testing and selected 25 that it considers most important. (EPA can select up to 30 contaminants every five years.) The contaminants were selected for three main reasons:

- EPA believes that they are likely to occur in drinking water.
- They could be harmful.
- There are testing methods to look for them in drinking water.
-

EPA divided the 25 contaminants into two lists. The 10 "List 1" (Assessment Monitoring) contaminants are monitored using testing methods that are more widely used. They include flame retardants (materials that stop fires from spreading), contaminants used in explosives, and contaminants related to insecticides. The 15 "List 2" (Screening Survey) contaminants are monitored using testing methods that are relatively new. They include nitrosamines (chemical compounds that exist in sources of drinking water or that form when disinfectants are added to water to kill microbes), herbicides (used to kill unwanted plants), and herbicide degradate (formed when herbicides change in the natural environment)

What Does UCMR2 Participation Involve? What Does It Cost?

Participating systems collect samples of drinking water and have them tested for UCMR contaminants. The largest water systems (serving more than 100,000 people) are testing for all 25 UCMR2 contaminants. Water systems serving 10,001 to 100,000 people are testing for all 10 contaminants on List 1. Some of these systems are also testing for the additional 15 contaminants on List 2. Selected small water systems (serving 10,000 or fewer people) are testing for either List 1 or List 2 contaminants (but not both). Large systems are paying their own testing costs (\$190-\$370 per sample, per testing method, on average). EPA is paying the testing costs for small systems and managing the analysis of small system samples.

What Will EPA Do With This Occurrence Information?

EPA will use this information on what contaminants are occurring in drinking water to help decide which contaminants might need to be regulated. When deciding to regulate a contaminant, EPA is required to consider the following:

- Whether the contaminant has the potential to harm human health.
- How often the contaminant occurs in public drinking water.
- Whether regulation presents a meaningful opportunity to reduce public health risks.

As a part of this process, EPA evaluates whether contaminants are occurring at levels that could harm humans. UCMR data help EPA to make this decision by providing information on how often, and at what levels, contaminants occur in drinking water.

