

Attachment (1)

Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality

FOURTH EDITION



6. APPLICATION OF THE GUIDELINES IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

The Guidelines provide a basis for derivation of standards for all packaged waters. As with other sources of drinking-water, safety is pursued through a combination of safety management and end product quality standards and testing and is more readily achievable because batches can be held until results are available. The international framework for packaged water regulation is provided by the Codex Alimentarius Commission of the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has developed a *Standard for natural mineral waters*—which describes the product and its compositional and quality factors, including prescribed treatments, limits for certain chemicals, hygiene, packaging and labelling—and an associated Code of Practice. It has also developed a *Standard for bottled/package waters* to cover packaged drinking-water other than natural mineral waters. Both relevant Codex standards refer directly to these Guidelines; the Codex standards for bottled/package water are directly equivalent to the guideline values established in these Guidelines. Under the Codex *Standard for natural mineral waters* and associated Code of Practice, natural mineral waters must conform to strict requirements, including collection and bottling without further treatment from a natural source, such as a spring or well. In comparison, the Codex *Standard for bottled/package waters* includes waters from other sources, in addition to springs and wells, and treatment to improve their safety and quality. The distinctions between these standards are especially relevant in regions where natural mineral waters have a long cultural history. For further information on the Codex *Standard for natural mineral waters* and its companion Code of Practice and the Codex *Standard for bottled/package waters*, readers are referred to the Codex web site (<http://www.codexalimentarius.net/>).

The Codex Alimentarius Commission's *Code of practice for collecting, processing and marketing of natural mineral waters* provides guidance on a range of good manufacturing practices and provides a generic WSP applied to packaged drinking-water.

Some consumers believe that certain natural mineral waters have medicinal properties or offer other health benefits. Some such waters have higher mineral content, sometimes significantly higher than concentrations normally accepted in drinking-water. They often have a long tradition of use and are often accepted on the basis that they are considered foods rather than drinking-water per se. Although certain mineral waters may be useful in providing essential micronutrients, such as calcium and magnesium, these Guidelines do not make recommendations regarding minimum concentrations of essential elements because of the uncertainties surrounding mineral nutrition from drinking-water. Packaged waters with very low mineral content, such as distilled or demineralized waters, are also consumed. There is insufficient scientific information on the benefits or hazards of long-term consumption of very low mineral waters to allow any recommendations to be made (WHO, 2005b; see also the supporting document *Calcium and magnesium in drinking-water*; Annex 1).

Another form of packaged water is ice that is intended for adding to drinks and which may come into contact with food to be eaten without cooking. Ice prepared and sold in this manner should be treated the same as any packaged water for potable use.