



OREGON  
**HEALTH**  
AUTHORITY

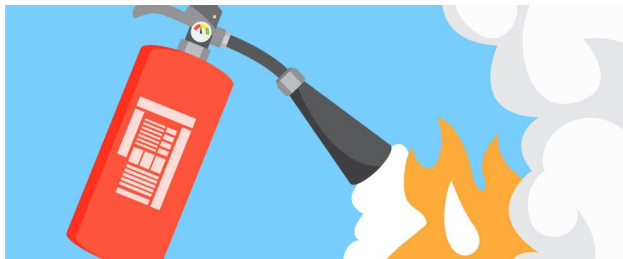
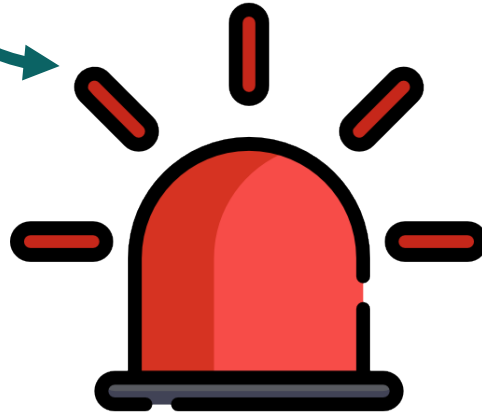
March 20, 2025

# **Water Quality Alerts: Tips & Best Practices**

**Nicole Alfafara**

**Drinking Water Services**

# ALERT 101



# What is a Water Quality Alert?

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- A report generated by the SDWIS data system when a PWS:
  - Reports a positive coliform detection
  - Exceeds the MCL for DBPs, RADs, & IOCs
  - Exceeds ½ the MCL for Nitrate
  - Detects of VOCs or SOCs
  - Exceeds the AL for L&C
  - Reports a WQP excursion

## Water Quality ALERT: LCRE:



To: Alfafara Nicole H  
Cc:

My System

You forwarded this message on 4/7/2025 2:05 PM.

Water Quality Compliance Alert

=====  
County :  
Agency :  
System Type: C

Contact :  
Phone :  
Address :  
City/State :

URL : <https://yourwater.oregon.gov/inventory.php>  
=====

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Alert ID : LCRE36761  
Contaminant : LCR Excursion  
Number of Excursions : 1  
Sample Period : 3/1/2025  
Data Received : 4/4/2025  
Sample Point : EP-A

Reply Reply All Forward

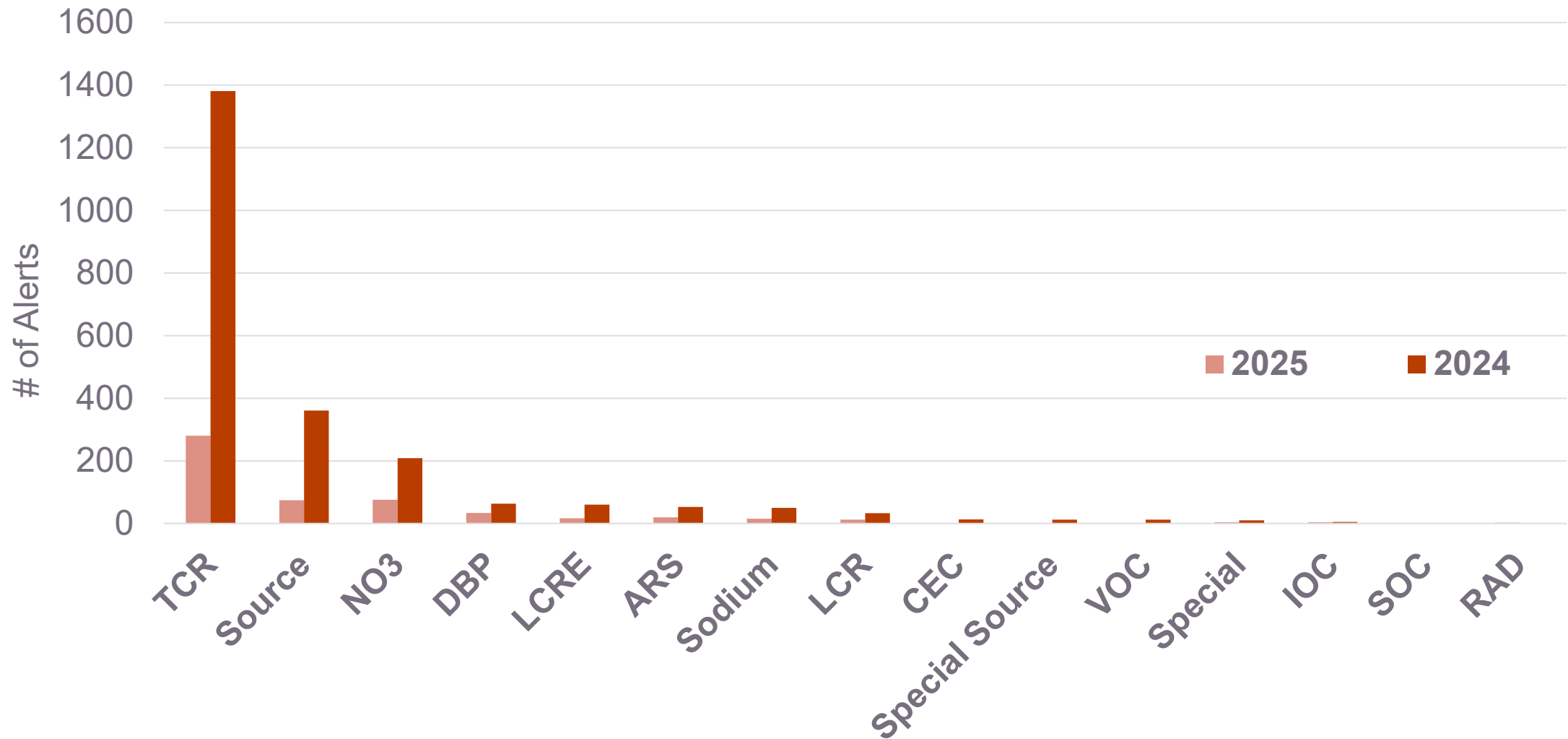
Mon 4/7/2025 1:55 PM

# Types of Alerts

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- Coliform (Total Coliform and *E. coli*)
- Lead & Copper
- LCR Excursion (i.e., WQP Minimum)
- DBPs
- RADs
- IOCs (e.g.: Arsenic, Nitrate, Fluoride, Sodium, etc.)
- VOCs
- SOCs

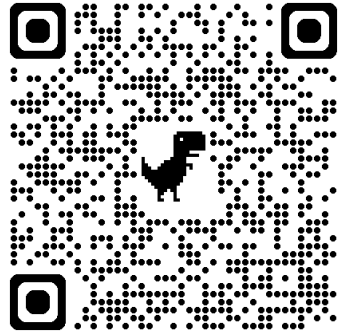
# Most Common Alerts



# What do I NEED to do when I get an Alert?

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- Investigate all Alerts for regulated contaminants *PE 50-4(b)(5)*.
- Acute MCL alerts (*E. coli*, Nitrate, Arsenic):
  - Immediately consult w/ PWS operators.
  - Ensure follow-up sampling, public notices, & corrective actions.
  - Submit Contact Report within 2 business days.
- All other alerts:
  - Promptly consult w/ PWS operators.
  - Ensure follow-up sampling, public notices, & corrective actions.
  - Submit Contact Report within 6 business days.
- Alert response is a performance measure via *PE50-(18)(b)*.



## Water Quality ALERT: LCRE:



To: Alfafara Nicole H  
Cc:

My System

You forwarded this message on 4/7/2025 2:05 PM.

Water Quality Compliance Alert

=====  
County :  
Agency :  
System Type: C

Contact :  
Phone :  
Address :  
City/State :

URL : <https://yourwater.oregon.gov/inventory.php>  
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Alert ID : LCRE36761  
Contaminant : LCR Excursion  
Number of Excursions : 1  
Sample Period : 3/1/2025  
Data Received : 4/4/2025  
Sample Point : EP-A

Reply Reply All Forward

Mon 4/7/2025 1:55 PM



Water Quality ALERT: LCRE [redacted] RICT  
OHA/Drinking Water Program Water Quality Compliance Alert

## Water Quality ALERT: LCRE:



To: Alfafara Nicole H  
Cc:

My System

You forwarded this message on 4/7/2025 2:05 PM.

Water Quality Compliance Alert



Reply

Reply All

Forward



Mon 4/7/2025 1:55 PM

County :  
Agency :  
System Type: C

Contact :  
Phone :  
Address :  
City/State :

URL : <https://>

Alert ID : L  
Contaminant  
Number of Excursion  
Sample Period  
Data Received  
Sample Point

## FW: Water Quality ALERT:



Alfafara Nicole H

To: Justin Kanoff; districtoperat

My System

Hi Dave and Justin,

The system had 2 LCR excursions for not meeting the minimum entry point pH level of 7.4 at EP-A in March of 2025. As of now the system has 3 excursion in the current 6 month monitoring period (January 1, 2025-June 30, 2025). Please note the system is allowed up to 9 excursions in a 6-month monitoring period, so no further action is needed at this time.

[Associated Contact Report](#)

Please let me know if you have any other questions.

Cheers,  
Nicole



Reply

Reply All

Forward



Mon 4/7/2025 2:06 PM

# Responding to an Alert

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Review & **learn** the alert yourself.



Then contact & **notify** the system.

*"Thoughtful, informed  
communication is more  
powerful than quick reaction"*

*Know your material before  
picking up the phone.*

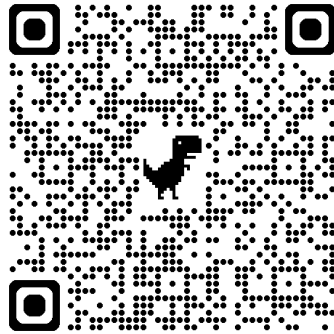
# Review the Alert Yourself

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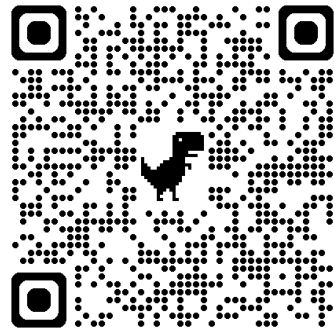
- **Learn** the context = prepare to assist.
  - System Info. – Type (CWS, NTNC, etc.) & source (GW/SW).
  - Compliance Status – Recent system alerts, violations, & advisories.
  - Alert Info. – contaminant, level reported, & sampling location.
  - Contaminant Info. – Current monitoring schedule, MCL, public health impacts, & applicable regulations/rules.
  - Next Steps – Required sampling, PN requirements, corrective actions, & RTC criteria.
  - Resources – Templates, Website Links, Certified/Accredited Labs List, etc.


# Other Resources

- Public Notice Templates




- Certified Labs Information





Oregon Public Health  
Drinking Water Data Online



Introduction :: Data Search Options :: Water System Search :: DWS Home :: DWS Rules

## Drinking Water Data Online

Welcome to Data Online, the data access site for [Oregon Drinking Water Services](#).

Here you can access data on public drinking water systems in Oregon, such as coliform and chemical testing, violations, enforcements, public notices, and basic system information.

The [Search Options](#) page explains many of the data pages that are available. Use the [Water System Search](#) page to find a water system by water system ID number, name, or location.

Data shown here are "live" data. That means they're as current as the reports we have in our system. This is the same data that Drinking Water Services (DWS) staff see and use. If something is missing, that usually means it has not been reported to us or we have not entered it yet. If you (water system personnel, county staff, lab staff, etc.) find a report is missing, please forward a copy to us at: DWS, PO BOX 14450, Portland, OR 97293-0450.

For questions or updates regarding water system sampling, inventory, or compliance, please contact Drinking Water Services at 971-673-0405 or [Info.DrinkingWater@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:Info.DrinkingWater@odhsoha.oregon.gov).

See the [Contact Us](#) page on the main Drinking Water site for more contact options.

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Information for all water systems:


[Water System Inventory](#) :: [Water System Surveys](#) :: [Outstanding Performers](#) :: [Treatment Plant Inspections](#) :: [Treatment](#) :: [Plan Reviews](#)  
[Alerts](#) :: [Violations](#) :: [Compliance & Enforcement](#) :: [Deficiencies](#) :: [System Scores](#) :: [Exceedances](#) :: [Public Notices](#) :: [Service Lines](#)  
[Water Advisories](#) :: [Contact Reports](#) :: [Cyanotoxins](#) :: [PFAS](#) :: [Post-wildfire VOCs](#) :: [Fluoride](#) :: [Cenitication List](#) :: [DWS Source Protection](#)

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Main menu: [Introduction](#) :: [Data Search Options](#) :: [Water System Search](#) :: [DWS Home](#) :: [DWS Rules](#)

Staff/Partner Login

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About OHA ▾ Programs and Services ▾ Oregon Health Plan ▾ Health System Reform ▾ Licenses and Certificates ▾

Public Health ▾ Jobs ▾


[Public Health Division](#) > [Environmental Public Health](#) > [Drinking Water](#)

## Oregon Drinking Water Services

### Working to keep drinking water safe for Oregonians


Access to safe drinking water is essential to human health. Oregon Drinking Water Services helps to keep drinking water safe for Oregonians.

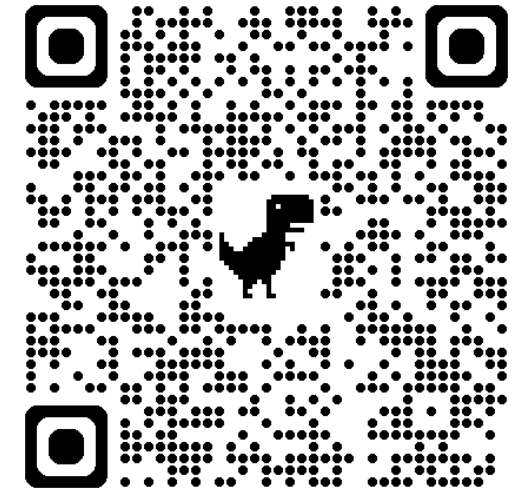
Oregon Drinking Water Services (DWS) administers and enforces drinking water quality standards for public water systems in the state of Oregon. DWS focuses resources in the areas of highest public health benefit and promotes voluntary compliance with state and federal drinking water standards. DWS also emphasizes prevention of contamination through source water protection, provides technical assistance to water systems and provides water system operator training.



# Responding to Chemical Detection Handout

- “What to Do With Results Greater Than Zero (Detections)”

<div>  <b>What to Do With Results Greater Than Zero (Detections)</b>            Oregon Health Authority Drinking Water Services, Updated April 2018         </div>			
Problem	Action Needed	Resolution	OAR Citation
<b>Inorganics (including Arsenic)<sup>a</sup></b> Result over the MCL	Confirmation sample plus quarterly monitoring <sup>2</sup> . Confirmation sample must be taken within 2 weeks. Average initial + confirmation sample to determine compliance.	Review after 2 quarters for GW, after 4 quarters for SW. Sample qtrly until R&C <sup>b</sup> below MCL, but if running annual average (RAA) is above MCL, treatment is required. For arsenic, DWS generally requires 4 quarters for all systems before review.	<a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(f)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(g)(D)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(h)(B)</a>
<b>Nitrate and Nitrite<sup>a</sup></b> Result over the MCL	Confirmation sample plus quarterly monitoring.	If avg of initial + confirmation is above MCL, treatment is required. If avg < MCL, monitor quarterly until R&C <sup>b</sup> below MCL.	<a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(f)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(g)(B&amp;C)</a> and <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(h)(C)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(g)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(d)(C)</a>
<b>Nitrate and Nitrite<sup>a</sup></b> Result ≥ ½ the MCL	Quarterly monitoring	Continue monitoring qtrly. Review annually to determine whether system should continue quarterly monitoring. If results are R&C <sup>b</sup> below the MCL (for GW) or below ½ the MCL (for nitrates, SW), then system can return to annual monitoring.	<a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(g)</a> <a href="#">OAR 333-061-0036(2)(d)(C)</a> <a href="#">and D)</a>
			Confirmation sample Quarterly monitoring RAA calculation & compliance determination
			Confirmation sample Quarterly monitoring nitrate Quarterly monitoring nitrite & at least annually after that Quarterly monitoring nitrate Quarterly monitoring nitrite, & at least annually after that (in same quarter as the highest previous result)
			Source water testing WQP requirements Treatment requirements Lead public notice/education Monitoring after installing tx



# Contact the System about the Alert

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- Notify

- Outline Next Steps

Advisory / Sampling Required / Monitoring Schedule  $\Delta$  / PN

- Reveal RTC Criteria

- Document

- Provide Resources
  - Write Contact Report

- Follow-up (as needed)

## Tips

1. *Lead w/ clarity & break down the “reg speak”.*
2. *Frame guidance around shared goal.*
3. *Set clear expectations: clarify the “must” vs. the “should”.*
4. *Set them up for success.*





# Guess that ALERT: *Category*

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- Contaminant **Hint**
- Regulatory **Hint**
- Alert Response **Hint**

• **What type of ALERT does this describe?**





# 1. Guess that ALERT: *Food & Drink*

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- Contaminant can **naturally occur in soil/rock** or be **introduced during water treatment**—and it may be welcomed on french fries.
- There is **no MCL** but EPA has an **Advisory Level of 20 mg/L**.
- Can **affect taste** & raise a few eyebrows for folks on special/restricted diets.
- **What type of ALERT does this describe?**



# Responding to a Sodium ALERT

Hi Dan,

Just an FYI: Sodium level for Well #5 was at 26 mg/L from the sample collected in September (20 mg/L is the advisory level and sodium does not have a MCL).

[Associated Contact Report](#)

Let me know if you have any other questions.

Cheers,  
Nicole

Email System

DWS emailed system contact to inform them of recent sodium results. Sodium was 26 mg/L in the ASR well sample collected on 9/25/2023 (20 mg/L is the advisory level and sodium does not have a MCL). DWS staff notified Washington County contacts of the sodium results as well.

Contact Report

**Subject:** FW: Sodium Alert

Hi Washington County Partners!

A well had an alert for sodium.

This is merely an FYI.

OAR 333-061-0036 (2)(e)(B) mentions notification of the public health department.

Cheers,  
Nicole

Email Health Department

- (B) The water supplier shall report to the Authority the results of the analyses for sodium as prescribed in OAR 333-061-0040. The Authority shall notify local health officials of the test results.

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Alert ID	: LCRE35785
Contaminant	: LCR Excursion
Number of Excursions	: 25
Sample Period	: 9/1/2024
Data Received	: 10/8/2024
Sample Point	: EP-A

## 2. Guess that ALERT: *Pop Culture*

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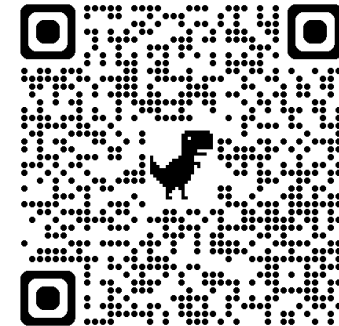
- Not necessarily a specific contaminant.
- If a system fails to meet minimum WQP levels more than 9 times in a 6-month monitoring period, the regulator could start singing these tunes :
  - Look What You Made DMCE Do... Issue a **Treatment Technique Violation**.
  - You Are Never Ever Getting Back to Compliance (at least during this **6-month monitoring period**).
  - Blank Space, Baby... And You can Write Your **Tier 2 PN Every 3 Months**.
  - You can NOT shake it off—you've got to do **two rounds of 6-month tap L&C sampling**.
- **What type of ALERT does this describe?**



# Responding to a **LCR Excursion** ALERT

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- Verify understanding of WQP minimums & their role in effective CCTX.
- Remind that no more than 9 excursions are permitted per each 6-month monitoring period.
- Inform a TT violation will be issued.
- Explain the Tier 2 PN requirement & provide template.
- Notify that tap LCR monitoring will revert to the original number of samples every 6 months (i.e., two 6-month rounds).
- Document communications in Contact Report.



### 3. Guess that ALERT: *History*

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- Gained attention in the 1940's for causing infant methemoglobinemia—aka “**blue baby syndrome**.”
- Crossing the Delaware was bold—but exceeding the **10 mg/L MCL**; that's a health risk we must declare with a **confirmation sample within 24 hours**..
- This one's no tea party—exceed the MCL and a **violation** is served, hot and steeped w/ a **Tier 1 PN** & **quarterly sampling**.
- When levels march past **5 mg/L (1/2 the MCL)**, it is **quarterly sampling** & the town crier/journalist must warn everyone in the annual **CCR**.

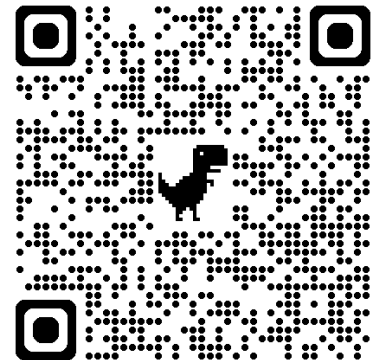
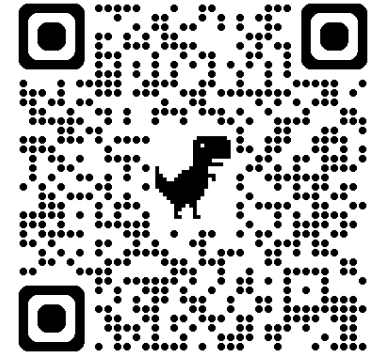


- **What type of ALERT does this describe?**

# Responding to a Nitrate ALERT (>10 mg/L)

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- Highlight health concerns
  - Infants < 6 months susceptibility
- Direct collection of confirmation sample
- Inform a MCL violation will be issued
- Explain the Tier 1 PN requirement & provide template.
- Notify of quarterly sampling schedule.
- Document communications in Contact Report.



# Responding to a Nitrate ALERT (>5 mg/L)

- Highlight health concerns.
- Notify of quarterly sampling schedule.
- Info. Statement in CCR
- Document communications in Contact Report.

From: Alfafara Nicole H <[Nicole.H.Alfafara@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:Nicole.H.Alfafara@oha.oregon.gov)>

Sent: Friday, February 14, 2025 10:21 AM

To: Jon Kawaguchi <[Jon\\_Kawaguchi@washingtoncountyor.gov](mailto:Jon_Kawaguchi@washingtoncountyor.gov)>; Larry Fenster <[Larry\\_Fenster@washingtoncountyor.gov](mailto:Larry_Fenster@washingtoncountyor.gov)>; Ashley Davis <[Ashley\\_Davis@washingtoncountyor.gov](mailto:Ashley_Davis@washingtoncountyor.gov)>; Dawn Wair <[Dawn\\_Wair@washingtoncountyor.gov](mailto:Dawn_Wair@washingtoncountyor.gov)>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Water Quality CHEM ALERT - PWS

Just a friendly "Nitrate above alert level but below the MCL" refresher:

Nicole's Next Steps Breakdown:

- Submit a request to DMC to place the system on a quarterly nitrate monitoring schedule and notify the system accordingly.
- Conduct an annual review to assess whether quarterly monitoring should continue.
- If results are reliably and consistently below the MCL for groundwater or below ½ the MCL for surface water nitrates, the system may transition back to annual monitoring.

Rule Ref: OAR 333-061-0036(2)(c)

Contact Report Example: The water system is now on quarterly nitrate monitoring due to elevated nitrate. The sample collected on XXX tested at XXX mg/L. This is under the MCL of 10ppm.

-Nicole

consistently below the MCL.

- (C) At TNC and state regulated water systems, water suppliers must monitor nitrate annually at each point in the distribution system representative of each source after treatment or at entry points to the distribution system after any application of treatment. At TNC water systems, water suppliers must monitor quarterly for at least one year following any one sample in which the concentration of nitrate is 50 percent of the MCL or greater. Monitoring may return to annual after four consecutive quarterly samples are found to be reliably and consistently below the MCL.

## 4. Guess that ALERT: *Geography/Travel*

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- No passport needed—just **TOC & free chlorine**! Born in Treatment Plant Republic, these contaminants roam the **Distribution** Empire
- **MCLs: 0.08 mg/L, 0.06 mg/L, 0.01 mg/L and 1.0 mg/L**—coordinates to trouble.
- Follow the **LRAA Trail**—a scenic, four-quarter **Stage 2** calculated journey. If you find yourself above the MCL, pull over for a **Tier 2 PN pitstop**—**violation** ahead and time to draft a **written corrective action plan**!
- **OEL**: = “Outta Expected Levels”—X marks the spot... and it smells a bit too treated to be treasure.
- **OEL** > MCL = no time for pretty postcards, time to **report on chlorine, organics, & treatment tweaks within 90 days**.
- **What type of ALERT does this describe?**

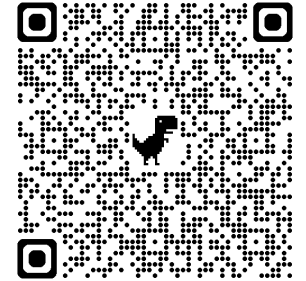




# Responding to a **DBP ALERT** (>MCL)

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- Review LRAA
- Inform a MCL violation will be issued.
- Explain the Tier 2 PN requirement & provide template.
- Explain Written Corrective Action Report requirement.
- Notify of quarterly sampling schedule.
- Document communications in Contact Report.



# Responding to a **DBP ALERT** (>MCL)

## OHA Drinking Water Services Contact Report Details

**PWS ID:**

**PWS Name:**

**Who Was Contacted:**

**Contact Phone:**

**Contact Date:** 09/27/2024

**Contacted By:** ALFAFARA, NICOLE (DWP)

**Contact Method/Location:** Phone

**Assistance Type:** WATER QUALITY ALERT RESPONSE

**Reasons:** Disinfection Byproducts

**Details:** In August of 2024 the systems DBP quarterly sample taken on August 13th resulted in the system TTHM exceeding both the OEL and the LRAA MCL of 0.08 mg/L (TTHM LRAA = 0.088 mg/L and TTHM OEL = 0.090 mg/L). The system was encouraged to reach out to the Circuit Rider to address the ongoing DBP level and was notified of the need to take the following steps:

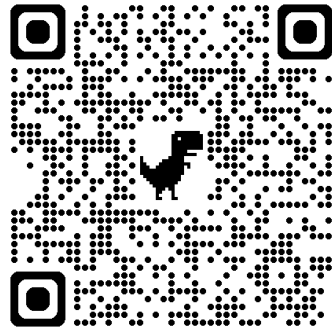
- Email DWS with a written plan within 90 days outlining how they will lower TTHM levels below the MCL that includes a projected timeline.
- Issue a public notice (PN Template) within 30 days to customer and submit a copy to DWS.

**Associated Alerts:** DBP-86 - 08/19/2024 - TTHM

# Responding to a **DBP** ALERT (>OEL)

- Review OEL

- Explain OEL report requirement.



- Document communications in Contact Report.

## OHA Drinking Water Services Contact Report Details

**PWS ID:**

**PWS Name:**

**Who Was Contacted:**

**Contact Phone:**

1)

**Contact Date:** 11/21/2023

**Contacted By:** HOFELD, EVAN (DWP)

**Contact Method/Location:** Email

**Assistance Type:** WATER QUALITY ALERT RESPONSE

**Reasons:** Disinfection Byproducts

**Details:** On 11/20/23 I received an alert for a TTHM result of 0.0925 mg/l from sampling completed 11/14/23 resulting in an OEL level of 0.083 mg/l and requiring an OEL report (no LRAA MCL was exceeded). I e-mailed David Nordman about the exceedance, the need to complete an OEL report, and included a link to information about OELs and the OEL report template we have on our website (the system had also exceeded the TTHM OEL and completed an OEL report in 3rd quarter 2023).

Update: The OEL report received on January 31, 2024, highlighted elevated levels of soluble organics, improper PASS-C dosage, and overdue cleaning of storage tanks may have attributed to the OEL exceedance. To address these concerns, the system intends to clean the tanks in February 2024 and increase coagulant dose in attempt to decrease soluble organics.

## BONUS ROUND

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Each of the 4 rounds in “*Guess That Alert!*” focused on a different type of water quality alert.

**What 4-letter acronym below represents those 4 alert types?**

- A. SNLC
- B. NELD
- C. SLND
- D. I have no idea.



## BONUS ROUND: S.L.N.D.

S.L.N.D. – Sodium. L&C Excurison. Nitrate. DBP.



S.L.N.D. – Signal. Learn. Notify. Document.



# Breakout Session Activity

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- **Signal:** You received an alert email that Timbers Island, a groundwater system in Goalpost County serving 2,025 had a routine coliform sample come back TC+/EC- at Site Diego #21.
- As a group discuss the ideal response:
  - What do you need to **learn**?
  - What do you need to **notify** the system's operator of?
  - Which **documentation** or resources, if any, must be submitted or posted, or would be helpful to share?
  - Draft a sample contact report or share your ALERT response tips.



# Breakout Session Recap

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# Final Take Home Messages

- SLND
- Responding to alerts isn't just about reacting—it's about assisting & directing with clarity, consistency, & confidence.
- Effectively navigating your responsibilities requires:
  - Proactive mindset.
  - Solid understanding of regulatory requirements.
  - Clear & timely communication.





# Questions & Contact Information

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## My Contact Information:

Phone: 503-278-1531

[Nicole.H.Alfajara@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:Nicole.H.Alfajara@oha.oregon.gov)



## General DWS Program Contact Information

Email: [info.drinkingwater@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:info.drinkingwater@odhsoha.oregon.gov)

Phone: 971-673-0405

Fax: 971-673-0694





OREGON  
**HEALTH**  
AUTHORITY

March 20, 2025

# **Water Quality Alerts: Tips & Best Practices**

**Nicole Alfafara**

**Drinking Water Services**