



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Commission urges Italy to ensure that water intended for human consumption is healthy and clean**

The European Commission is opening infringement proceedings against Italy for its failure to ensure that water intended for human consumption meets European standards. Water contamination from arsenic and fluoride is a long-standing problem in Italy, and for the Latium Region in particular.

Under the [Drinking Water Directive](#), Member States have to monitor and test water used for human consumption using 48 microbiological, chemical and indicator parameters. If high levels of arsenic or other pollutants are found, Member States may derogate from the thresholds established by the directive for a limited period of time, provided there is no potential danger to human health, and provided the supply for human consumption cannot be maintained by any other reasonable means.

The Directive allows for a total of three derogations, each limited to three years. Member States may derogate twice and, in exceptional cases, they may apply to the Commission for a third derogation. Italy has now derogated three times, and no further derogations are possible.

The derogation period was intended to allow for durable solutions to be found. More than one year after the expiry of the third derogation, Italy however remains in breach of the Directive.

Derogation decisions set strict conditions to safeguard human health. Italy was asked to ensure that wholesome supplies of water were available for consumption by infants and children up to the age of three. The derogations were conditional on Italy supplying users with adequate information on how to reduce the risks associated with the consumption of the drinking water in question and, in particular, the risks associated with the consumption of water by children. Italy was also required to implement a plan of remedial actions and inform the Commission on progress achieved.

The limit value for arsenic and fluoride is still not respected in 37 water supply zones in Latium. On the recommendation of Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik, the Commission is sending a letter of formal notice to Italy, the first formal stage in infringement proceedings.

### **Background**

The objective of the Drinking Water Directive (Directive 98/83/EC of the Council of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption - OJ L 330 of 5.12.1998, p. 32) is to protect human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring that it is wholesome and clean.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring semi-metal element which is tasteless and odourless, and can enter drinking water supplies from natural deposits in the earth. Elevated levels in water can cause serious health problems, including skin damage, circulatory problems, and an increased risk of cancer.

**For more information:**

More details on drinking water policy:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-drink/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-drink/index_en.html)

**See also:**

On this month's infringement package decisions, see [MEMO/14/470](#)

On the general infringement procedure, see [MEMO/12/12](#)

For more information on infringement procedures:

[http://ec.europa.eu/eu\\_law/infringements/infringements\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu_law/infringements/infringements_en.htm)

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