

Harbor Water – Seasonal Water Quality Update

Harbor Water would like to provide our customers with an update regarding the seasonal change currently being observed in our drinking water.

Based on current testing, the water remains safe for use and continues to be tested for the same drinking-water contaminants as it is throughout the year. There has been no change in our routine water-quality testing or monitoring.

The change customers may currently notice is an increase in salt content caused by seasonal saltwater intrusion from the ocean. During the late summer and early fall, river levels are naturally lower. When these lower river levels occur at the same time as higher tides, saltwater is able to move farther upstream and temporarily increase the salinity of our source water.

For comparison, our source water normally measures approximately 40–50 µS/cm in conductivity during the majority of the year. During the recent high-tide event, conductivity can reach ranges as high as 500 - 1,001 µS/cm. As the tide and saltwater influence decreases, the reading will reflect that. These changes are consistent with the seasonal tidal influence we experience when river levels are low.

The increase in conductivity is related to the presence of dissolved salts and does not indicate that other contaminants have increased. Harbor Water continues to perform required water-quality testing and monitor the system closely.

Customers may notice that the water has a saltier taste during these periods. This condition is seasonal and is expected to improve as tidal conditions change and freshwater levels in the river increase.

Harbor Water will continue monitoring the source water and posting any significant changes on our website and Face Book page. We appreciate our community's patience and understanding during this seasonal event.

Understanding Salt in Drinking Water: EPA Guidance & Health Information

Harbor Water understands that an increase in saltiness can raise questions about drinking-water safety. We would like to provide some additional information regarding how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) addresses salt-related minerals in drinking water. EPA explicitly says secondary standards are non-mandatory federal guidelines for aesthetic and technical concerns and that contaminants at the secondary level are not considered a health risk.

EPA does not establish a federal primary, health-based Maximum Contaminant Level for ordinary sodium or chloride in drinking water. Instead, EPA has established a Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level for chloride and Total Dissolved Solids. Secondary standards are intended primarily to address water-quality characteristics such as salty taste, mineral deposits, staining, and potential effects on plumbing—not to identify a concentration at which water suddenly becomes unsafe to drink.

What About Sodium?

Sodium is a naturally occurring electrolyte that the human body needs for normal functions including hydration, blood volume, nerve function, and muscle function.

For most individuals, food is the primary source of dietary sodium and drinking water normally contributes only a relatively small portion of total sodium intake. EPA does, however, provide special guidance for individuals who have been prescribed a very low or restrictive sodium diet of approximately 500 mg per day. [EPA specifically states that this guidance was developed for people on a highly restricted diet and should not be applied as a health limit for the general population.](#)

Individuals who have been advised by their healthcare provider to closely restrict sodium intake, including those being treated for sodium-sensitive hypertension, should consider the sodium concentration of their drinking water as part of their total daily sodium intake and discuss any concerns with their healthcare provider.

Our focus is therefore on monitoring the seasonal increase and keeping customers informed.

What This Means for Harbor Water Customers.

This change affects the mineral and salt content of the source water; it does not mean that other drinking-water contaminants have increased.

Harbor Water continues to perform its required drinking-water testing and monitoring. [Based on current water-quality testing, the water continues to meet applicable health-based drinking-water requirements.](#)

Customers may notice a salty taste during periods of elevated salinity. Those who have been instructed by a physician or healthcare provider to follow a very low-sodium diet may wish to use our alternative drinking-water supply while salinity remains elevated.

Harbor Water will continue monitoring conditions and will provide updates as river levels, tides, and source-water salinity change.

Health & Dietary Information Regarding Seasonal Salinity

[Harbor Water cannot provide medical advice or make individual health or dietary recommendations regarding sodium or salt intake.](#)

Every person's health, dietary needs, medications, and medical conditions are different. Customers who have been advised to limit sodium or who have concerns about how the current salinity levels may affect their health should consult their physician or other qualified healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider is the appropriate person to determine whether you should make any changes to your drinking-water source based on your individual health needs.

It is also important to understand that the conductivity readings Harbor Water currently reports in $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ (microsiemens per centimeter) measure the [overall electrical conductivity of the water](#). These readings are [not the same as a sodium concentration in mg/L and should not be interpreted as an individual's dietary sodium intake.](#)

For customers who would like additional information about drinking-water regulations and water-quality standards, Harbor Water recommends the following official resources:

Oregon Health Authority – Drinking Water Services (OHA DWS)

OHA Drinking Water Services is the state agency responsible for administering and enforcing drinking-water regulations for Oregon public water systems. Oregon's public drinking-water regulations are contained in *Oregon Administrative Rules, Chapter 333, Division 061*.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Drinking Water Regulations

The EPA establishes federal drinking-water standards and provides information regarding primary health-based drinking-water standards as well as *secondary standards* related to characteristics such as taste, odor, and appearance.

EPA currently lists **chloride at 250 mg/L and Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) at 500 mg/L as Secondary Maximum Contaminant Levels**. Secondary standards primarily address aesthetic and technical water-quality concerns and are different from EPA's primary, health-based drinking-water standards.

Harbor Water will continue to monitor our water quality and provide customers with factual information regarding testing results and changing source-water conditions. **Questions regarding an individual's health, sodium intake, or dietary restrictions should be directed to that individual's healthcare provider.**