

HEALTH ASPECTS OF PLUMBING



**World Health
Organization**

WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Health aspects of plumbing.

Published jointly by World Health Organization and World Plumbing Council.

1. Water supply. 2. Water treatment. 3. Waste disposal, Fluid.
4. Sanitary engineering. 5. Guidelines. I. World Health Organization.
II. World Plumbing Council.

ISBN 92 4 156318 4

(NLM classification: WA 675)

ISBN 978 92 4 156318 5

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Designed by minimum graphics
Printed in Switzerland

Contents

Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Abbreviations and acronyms	x
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Ensuring water safety in production and distribution systems	2
1.2 Removal of liquid waste	3
1.3 Risk of contamination through cross-connections	4
1.4 Periodic inspection	5
2. Basic principles of safe drinking-water supply	6
2.1 Water quantity	6
2.2 Water quality and safety	6
2.3 Public drinking-water supplies	7
3. Hazards in drinking-water supply and waste management	10
3.1 Microbial risks: waterborne infectious disease	10
3.2 Chemical risks	13
3.3 Other risks	15
4. Water safety plans in the operation and management of water systems	18
5. The role of plumbers in risk assessment and risk management	20
5.1 Risk recognition	20
5.2 Risk evaluation and analysis	21
5.3 Risk abatement	21
5.4 Risk acceptance and risk transfer	22
6. Principles of effective plumbing systems	23
6.1 Water supply goals	23
6.2 Liquid waste disposal goals	25
6.3 Plumbing goals	27
7. Codes of practice for plumbing	28
7.1 A sample model code of practice	30
7.2 Applications for approval to install plumbing systems	33
7.3 Setting plumbing standards	34
7.4 Quality assurance and testing	35
7.5 Disinfection of new plumbing installations	37
8. Implementation of the plumbing code of practice	40
8.1 Application and approval process	40

8.2	Certification of conformance	41
8.3	Periodic inspection	42
8.4	Penalties and enforcement	42
8.5	Financial aspects of administration of the plumbing code of practice	43
9.	Training and registration of plumbers	44
9.1	Training prior to admission to the plumbing trade	44
9.2	Licensing and registration	45
9.3	Establishing a training programme	45
10.	Standards for materials used in plumbing systems	46
10.1	Standards	46
10.2	Products and materials used in plumbing	47
10.3	Metallic and non-metallic materials used in pipework	49
10.4	General issues related to use of plastic piping	52
10.5	Earthenware pipes	53
10.6	Design of plumbing fixtures	54
10.7	Sanitary fixtures	55
10.8	Concrete products	55
11.	Design of plumbing systems	57
11.1	Drinking-water supply pipes and specifications	57
11.2	Drainpipes	58
12.	Design of plumbing systems for single dwellings	60
12.1	General considerations	60
12.2	Domestic storage tanks	61
12.3	Domestic water closets	62
12.4	Wastewater traps	63
12.5	Drains and ventilation pipes	64
12.6	Connections to the public sewer	66
13.	Design of plumbing systems for multiple dwellings	67
13.1	Domestic storage tanks	68
13.2	Control valves	68
13.3	Waste systems	68
14.	Design of plumbing systems for multi-storey buildings	71
14.1	Systems for boosting water pressure	71
14.2	Drainage systems	73
14.3	Hot water and other dual supply systems	75
14.4	Water storage vessels	77
14.5	Labelling and colour coding of non-drinking-water supply systems	79
14.6	Situations where there is a risk of cross-connection	80
14.7	Fixture unit calculations for multiple dwellings	82
15.	Design of plumbing systems for industrial and temporary applications	85
15.1	Backflow prevention in industrial, commercial and institutional water systems	85
15.2	Backflow and backsiphonage	85
15.3	Water system backflow protection devices	86

15.4	Guidance for protective devices	93
15.5	Guidance for sanitary waste systems	94
15.6	Storm water drainage systems	95
15.7	Temporary plumbing installations and connections	96
16.	Storm water drainage	98
16.1	Discharge into storm water channels or pipes	98
16.2	Combined sewers	99
16.3	Soakaways	99
16.4	Rainwater tanks	100
16.5	Rainwater intensity and roof drainage	100
17.	Intermediate and communal models for drinking-water supply and sanitation	103
17.1	Intermediate types of drinking-water supply and sanitation	103
17.2	Household water treatment	105
17.3	Communal systems for drinking-water supply and sanitation	105
18.	Conservation of water in public and domestic supply systems	107
18.1	Special problems associated with public buildings and communal accommodation	108
18.2	Leakage and wastage in the public drinking-water supply system	108
18.3	Leakage and wastage from private drinking-water supply systems	109
18.4	Use of meters to reduce wastage and excess consumption	109
18.5	Minimizing systematic excessive and wasteful use of water	110
18.6	Minimizing water usage in flushing cisterns	111
18.7	Minimizing water wastage in lawn and garden irrigation	112
18.8	Attempts to reduce water usage through intermittent supply	112
19.	Wastewater use	114
19.1	Use of greywater	114
19.2	Use of wastewater	115
19.3	Management of dual water systems	115
19.4	Identification of potable and non-potable drinking-water systems	116
	Glossary of plumbing and other terms used in the text	118
	Bibliography	123
	Contributing authors	125
	Index	126

Figures

Figure 15.1	Atmospheric vacuum breaker	86
Figure 15.2	Atmospheric vacuum breaker (normal flow and backflow conditions)	87
Figure 15.3	Double check valve assemblies	88
Figure 15.4	Pressure vacuum breaker	88
Figure 15.5	Backsiphonage illustration	89
Figure 15.6	Reduced pressure principle backflow preventer	90
Figure 15.7	Shipyards backflow contamination	91

Figure 15.8 Grease trap	91
Figure 15.9 Grease interceptor	92
Figure 15.10 Precast concrete sand and oil interceptor	92

Tables

Table 2.1 Typical volumes of fluid intake (from food and water) required for hydration	7
Table 11.1 Typical demands for various uses	58
Table 11.2 Minimum internal diameter of water pipes to plumbing fixtures	59
Table 11.3 Gradients to produce minimum and maximum velocities in drains	59
Table 14.1 Advantages and disadvantages of vacuum systems (versus gravity systems)	74
Table 14.2 Comparison of installation and operation requirements of drainage systems	74
Table 14.3 Fixture unit values for some common plumbing fixtures	83
Table 14.4 Peak water demand of plumbing fixtures	84
Table 14.5 Maximum loads for horizontal fixture branches and building drains or sewers	84
Table 16.1 Gutter slopes and roof drainage: rainfall intensity 100 mm per hour	101
Table 16.2 Roof areas drained by vertical downspouts: rainfall intensity 100 mm per hour	102
Table 16.3 Capacities of horizontal storm drains: rainfall intensity 100 mm per hour	102
Table 17.1 Service level descriptors of water in relation to hygiene	104
Table 19.1 Suitability for reuse of different grades of water	115
Table 19.2 Minimum length of colour field and size of letters	117

Case studies

Case study 1. SARS in Hong Kong	3
Case study 2. Drinking-water supply and waste removal in Dhaka	9
Case study 3. Chlordane backflow or backsiphonage	87
Case study 4. Backsiphonage from a hose	88
Case study 5. Shipyard cross-connection	90

Preface

The United Nations has declared 2005–2015 the International Decade for Action “Water for Life”, setting a world agenda that focuses increased attention on water-related issues. This initiative is of extraordinary importance in a world where preventable diseases related to water and sanitation claim the lives of about 3.1 million people a year, most of them children less than five years old. Of these, about 1.6 million people die from diarrhoeal diseases associated with lack of safe drinking-water and adequate sanitation.

By including safe drinking-water supply and sanitation in the Millennium Development Goals, the world community has acknowledged the importance of their promotion as development and health interventions and has set a series of goals and targets accordingly. Goal 7, target 10 requests the world to “halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation”. The task is huge: in 2002, 1.1 billion people (two thirds of them in Asia, and 42% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa) lacked access to improved water sources. At least 2.6 billion people lacked access to improved sanitation; over half of them live in China and India. Only 31% of rural inhabitants in developing countries have access to improved sanitation, versus 73% of urban dwellers (WHO 2004b). Achieving the Millennium Development Goal drinking-water and sanitation target requires that 97 million additional people gain access to drinking-water services and 138 million additional people to sanitation annually up to 2015.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights has issued a statement declaring access to safe drinking-water to be a human right. The declaration reads:

“Water is fundamental to life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a healthy life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite to the realization of other human rights.”

The World Plumbing Council and the World Health Organization, working within the spirit of those resolutions, present this document on health aspects of plumbing noting that sustainable health, especially for children, is not possible without access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation facilities. This publication is dedicated to assisting in achieving the best possible plumbing levels to ensure the highest health benefits from use of sound plumbing practices. This is

especially important at a time when only 50% of the world population has access to piped drinking-water systems within the property and 31% has piped sanitation facilities connected to a public sewer system. The World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund statistics on drinking-water and sanitation indicate a sharp acceleration of efforts towards access to types of drinking-water and sanitation facilities requiring a considerable level of plumbing. It is thus vital that developing countries adopt or improve their plumbing practices taking into account the need to minimize the current and future risks of epidemics and diseases associated with poor plumbing.

The World Health Organization and the World Plumbing Council will feel rewarded if this document achieves its ultimate aim: to play a strategic role in facilitating the adoption of good plumbing practices in developing countries to ensure the health gains and well-being expected from such systems.

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