



Tel. direct: +41 22 791 3555
Fax direct: +41 22 791 4159
E-mail : bosr@who.int

In reply please
refer to:

Your reference:

Mr Mike Pickavance
Chairman
European Water Treatment Association
C/o UNIZO
Spastraat 8
B-1000 Brussels

12 August 2010

Dear Mr Pickavance,

**Background document for development of WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality:
"Hardness in Drinking-water"**

Thank you for your letter of 23 February 2010, which outlined your concerns regarding the WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality background document: "Hardness in Drinking-water."

This background document incorporates some of the key consensus recommendations, formulated during a meeting of experts in Washington DC, USA on 27–28 April 2006, which considered the latest available evidence on the linkages between calcium and magnesium in drinking-water and nutrition and health. Meeting participants included medical, nutrition, epidemiological, and water technology experts. The conclusions of a prior International Symposium on Health Aspects of Calcium and Magnesium in Drinking Water held in Baltimore USA -- where industry was represented -- were also considered. These recommendations were published in *Calcium and Magnesium in Drinking-water: Public health significance* (WHO 2009).

.../..

cc.: Regional Director, AFRO, attn.: DES
Regional Director, AMRO, attn.: DES
Regional Director, EMRO, attn.: DHPP
Regional Director, EURO, attn.: DTS
Regional Director, WPRO, attn.: DHP
Regional Director, SEARO, attn.: SDE
Members of the Drinking Water Quality Committee

In this publication, the expert view is firm that the consumers should have access to information on the mineral composition of their water. Moreover, if mineral composition is significantly altered through processing, then consumers should be informed.

Upon a review of the background document, "Hardness in Drinking-water", we do acknowledge that issues associated with household water treatment and water hardness were perhaps highlighted more than other relevant issues. Therefore, we are proposing to address additional issues in greater depth, including central desalination, indirect wastewater reuse, packaged water, naturally soft water and collected rainwater.

We also note that benefits associated either with naturally or conditioned soft water, including issues associated with consumer acceptability, scaling, and a possible link with decreased childhood eczema, are addressed in the document, but could be highlighted more, possibly through the use of headings.

The WHO Drinking-water Quality Committee will consider these issues when making its revisions at its next meeting. Of course, we will aim to ensure an evidence-based and balanced presentation of the key health-related issues.

Thank you for your interest in the work of the World Health Organization

Yours sincerely,



for

Robert Bos
Coordinator
Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Health