



Guidance: Report and Respond to Tampering Events or Security Threats

Drinking Water Facilities Response

Updated 09/20/2023

This document is an action based tool to use when your facility experiences actual, threatened, or suspected physical damage, tampering, or disruption. Tampering can pose an unacceptable risk to public health. The Department would like to stress that our intention is to:

1. Help support the system experiencing the event(s) by connecting them with state and federal agencies that specialize in tampering and security issues in the water sector.
2. Help support the industry and gather information to identify trends across the water sector.

Tampering or Suspected Tampering Events Must be Reported

Per [Regulation 11.2\(1\)](#), tampering events, suspected tampering, or receipt of a tampering threat must be reported to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (Department). “TAMPER” means to introduce a contaminant into a public water system or into drinking water or to otherwise interfere with drinking water or the operation of a public water system with the intention of harming people or public water systems. It does not include the standard accepted treatment procedures performed by the supplier in preparing water for human consumption.

The regulation also stipulates that the supplier must notify the Department as soon as possible but no later than 10 a.m. of the next calendar day and notify the Department in writing no later than 5 days after any attempted, confirmed, or suspected tampering, or receipt of a tampering threat. Failure to report attempted, suspected, or confirmed tampering in a timely manner may result in a violation of Regulation 11. More information about how to contact the Department can be found below.

Attempted or suspected tampering is reportable even if the event is not successful or confirmed. When in doubt, please contact the Department.

What constitutes an attempted, suspected or confirmed tampering event?

Tampering events can be any of the following:

- Introducing a contaminant into a public water system or drinking water.

- Interfering with drinking water or the operation of a public water system with the intention of harming people or public water systems.
- Vandalism that physically damages storage tanks, fire hydrants, locks on well buildings, well heads, intake structures, pump stations, treatment plants, backflow devices, or any other part of the physical infrastructure of the drinking water system.
- Any action that damages the integrity of a drinking water system or causes harm to the system including expending resources (staff's time, funding to replace or repair damaged infrastructure, water loss, etc.)
- Unapproved removal of critical records, equipment, or chemicals.

Examples of previous tampering events that required reporting to the Department:

- Verbal threat of violence to the water system infrastructure
- Malicious damage to fire hydrants in the distribution system (potential cross connection or loss of pressure)
- Cybersecurity attack - ransomware attack that withheld SCADA system and billing system
- Tank hatch alarm sounding frequently with no system staff in area
- Vandalism of security fencing and a well house
- Purposefully attempting to drain distribution system or storage tank, opening and closing valves without permission, intentional damage

What does not constitute a tampering event:

- Any vandalism that poses no potential risk to public health like non-destructive tagging that does not result in excessive costs to the system for removal/repair.
- Accidental damage to the system such as a car accident that results in damage to a hydrant.
- Water theft is not considered tampering unless there is intent to damage or interfere with the system. Regardless if the theft is tampering, please contact your local law enforcement.

This guidance can be used when your water system experiences vandalism or tampering with the intent to harm people or public water systems, intentional malicious acts, anything that looks like terrorism, or threats of any of the above items.

For more information visit [Colorado Revised Statutes 25: 1-114. 1\(6\).](#)

Reporting

What action to take?

- Notify the Department as soon as possible (contact info. below), but no later than 10 a.m. of the calendar day following any tampering, suspected tampering, or receipt of tampering threat by the system. Note that suspected tampering should be reported when the tampering is first suspected, and not when the tampering event is confirmed.
- Provide written notice within five calendar days to the Department explaining the circumstances of the occurrence and setting forth the action(s) taken to ensure the

ability of the system to provide a safe and reliable supply of drinking water and to prevent any recurrence.

- Report this event to local law enforcement as tampering with drinking water could be a criminal act.
- Fill out a Suspicious Activity Report through the [Colorado Information Analysis Center](#) to help protect your system against tampering threats and respond to tampering events.

Who to contact at the Department?

- If there is a known or suspected contamination event, call the Department's 24-hour reporting hotline at 1-877-518-5608 as soon as possible but no later than 10 a.m. of the day following the incident.
- If there is no known or suspected contamination due to the tampering event, please get in touch with your compliance officer. To find your compliance officer go to the [drinking water compliance assurance webpage](#) and at the bottom of the screen search for your county.
- Fill out a [Tampering Threat and Incident Report Form](#).
 - Fill out within 5 calendar days of the incident .
 - If you have issues accessing the form please fill out the [pdf version](#) of the form and submit it to cdphe.wqacutes@state.co.us.

What information to communicate?

The following information is required to fill out the incident report form:

1. Location of incident and public water system identification.
2. Date and time of incident.
3. Type of threat or incident.
4. Water system contact name and phone number.
5. Method of discovery (consumer complaint, witness, perpetrator, employee report).
6. Response actions taken (water quality parameter testing, isolation of affected water).
7. Recovery actions taken.
8. Notifications made (law enforcement, news media, etc.).
9. Assessment of threat, if possible.

What to expect after reporting?

- The department will call the public water system that reported the event to determine the extent of the incident and coordinate the follow up process from a drinking water safety perspective.
- The affected water system will be asked to write a report and submit it to the drinking water quality acute team within five days of the incident to fulfill the regulatory requirements. This regulatory requirement can be satisfied by using the [Tampering Threat and Incident Report Form](#).
- The division will notify the EPA, provide resources, and work with the system in the event of a public health emergency. As a result of the department reaching out to the

EPA, other federal partners may become involved. The division will work to provide our state and federal partners with pertinent information.

Simple actions to help prevent tampering events

1. Assess vulnerabilities in your system and make easy security improvements:
 - a. Heavy duty locks on access to tanks and treatment.
 - b. Alarms at entry points.
 - c. Lighting activated by sensors.
 - d. Video cameras.
2. Alert residents living near treatment plants and tanks to be vigilant about suspicious activity.
3. Delegate a person to do more frequent checks of well, treatment, tanks, and chlorine residual.
4. Post signs on access points that clearly display “Tampering with a public water system is a federal offense with prison time up to 20 years. Violators will be prosecuted per [42 U.S. Code 300i-1](#).”