

# Community Notice

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## Update - town water quality

### Update from 22 April 2015 Community Information

On 22 April 2015, RTA Gove Operations (RTAG) updated the community on an issue involving elevated trace metals identified in water samples taken from older buildings of the Gove Airport facilities and at locations in the town.

RTAG has continued to work with independent consultants and Nhulunbuy Corporation (NCL) to confirm the potential causes of the elevated results, through further testing and investigation of the water supply network. In order to complete these tests, and to ensure the water network is operating correctly, RTAG is performing maintenance work and operations tests which require network isolations and operational adjustments. Undertaking this work necessitated a sprinkler ban late last week. RTAG has engaged with NT Department of Health (DoH) throughout the process.

Whilst investigation and testing continues, evidence to date suggests that metal traces are absorbed into the water when water sits in metal pipework. For this reason, RTAG, in accordance with the NT DoH recommendations, continues to suggest that households and businesses flush drinking water pipes prior to initial use for the day and whenever taps have not been used for six hours or more. Flushing should be adequate to ensure the mains water supply has replaced water sitting in house pipes. Although the amount of flushing required is influenced by pipe length, recent water sampling undertaken by DoH utilising a thirty second flush was effective in reducing metal levels below Australian Drinking Water Guideline levels in all residential properties sampled.

For further information please refer to Factsheet 416 provided by DoH at:  
[http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental\\_Health/Water\\_Quality/#FactSheetsWaterQuality](http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Water_Quality/#FactSheetsWaterQuality).

We will keep you updated regarding the outcomes of our ongoing investigations. If you have any concerns or queries please contact the RTA Gove Operations 24 Hour Community Hotline on 1800 996 508.

Ben Devries  
**General Manager, Gove Operations**

## Questions and Answers

### ***Is the water safe to drink?***

All testing has been done in accordance with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG). The health guideline value within the ADWG is the concentration or measure of a water quality characteristic that, based on present knowledge, does not result in any significant risk to the health of consumers over a lifetime of consumption.

Of the samples which returned a reading for trace metals that exceeded the ADWG, the elevation was not significant.

Based on the testing conducted at buildings in town, the precautionary approach of flushing drinking water taps prior to initial use for the day and whenever taps have not been used for six hours or more reduces any potential excess metal levels in the water.

### ***How did the metal traces get into the water?***

While our investigations are continuing, evidence to date suggests that the metal traces are absorbed into the water when water sits in metal pipework. This is not an uncommon issue. Please refer to the attached DoH factsheet for further information.

### ***How do we know that the pipes cause the trace metals?***

The source water, supplied to the town of Nhulunbuy, comes from 19 feeder bores located outside of town. This water is regularly tested at the feeder bores and is known to have very low trace amounts of metals.

### ***What metals are in the water?***

The DoH tested the water supply at selected vacant properties for a range of metals, with results showing some had levels of lead and iron in excess of guideline values. Vacant properties were selected as they were likely to show the highest readings for trace metals due to the latent water in the pipes.

Of the samples which returned a reading for trace metals that exceeded the ADWG, the elevation was not significant.

### ***Will every house in town be tested?***

Rio Tinto Alcan conducts regular testing of the water supply to all parts of the town, and we will continue to work with the DoH to further improve this testing regime. If you have any concerns regarding the water at your house, call the Rio Tinto Alcan Community Relations Hotline on 1800 996 508.

### ***What plans does Rio Tinto Alcan have to ensure people do not inadvertently drink from taps in vacant properties without first flushing?***

LJ Hooker, which manages all Rio Tinto Alcan and Developing East Arnhem vacant properties, will continue to advise tenants—incoming and current—about individual properties.

### ***When can we stop flushing our pipes before drinking the water?***

Our investigations are continuing. Rio Tinto Alcan will ensure that the community continues to be updated through community notices such as this one. The next planned update will be in 4 weeks.

### ***Who can I contact for further information?***

Factsheet 416 can be found at

[http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental\\_Health/Water\\_Quality/#FactSheetsWaterQuality](http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Water_Quality/#FactSheetsWaterQuality)

For other queries, please contact the Rio Tinto Alcan Community Relations Hotline on 1800 996 508.