



Anacortes Water Treatment Plant FAQ

About Anacortes Water Treatment Plant

The City of Anacortes has been providing quality water for the past 91 years. The City owns and operates a regional water treatment plant located near Mount Vernon, on the east bank of the Skagit River.

Is our water safe?

- Yes. The City's annual consumer water reports detail a safe, high-quality water product year after year. State and Federal regulations require that the EPA test the safety of our drinking water annually and each year the water from the Anacortes Water Treatment Plant has significantly exceeded the standards in each testing category.

Where does the water come from?

- The Skagit River. The Skagit is the largest of the Puget Sound river basins. The mainstream river runs 162 miles from the North Cascades to the shores of the Puget Sound.

Are there any public health concerns?

- No. The City has concluded through a great deal of testing that the contaminants found on the site of the old water treatment plant came from the dated building materials used there. As the independent expert Human Health Risk Assessment determined, no adverse health effects are likely to have occurred to workers, customers, or visitors at the old water treatment plant.

What is the Plant's water quality history?

- The City of Anacortes publishes an annual consumer confidence report that provides an overview of water quality during the previous calendar year. This is done in accordance with requirements by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The Anacortes Water Treatment Plant is and has been in full compliance with all regulations.

Who conducts the annual water tests?

- Anacortes Water Treatment Plant staff conducts the annual consumer confidence report in accordance with requirements by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).

Who are the Plant's customers?

- The Plant now serves around 56,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers. Customers include: The cities of Anacortes, La Conner and Oak Harbor; Whidbey Island Naval Air Station; Skagit PUD Swinomish Indian Tribal Community; Shell Puget Sound Refinery and Tesoro Refinery.

Why did the City build a new water treatment plant?

- The City realized that the Anacortes Water Treatment Plant needed to modernize and increase capacity in order to address growth and service to customers. In 2013, the City replaced the previous water plant with a new plant on the same property on the Skagit River. The new facility is adjacent to the old facility, but they are not connected in any way. The new facility includes ballasted sedimentation for pretreatment, 8 new filters, a new above-ground clearwell, and a new high-service pumping station. The capacity of the new plant is 42 MGD (million gallons per day), expandable to 55 MGD.

What are PCBs and why were they used at the Plant?

- Decades ago, PCBs were commonly used in paints, caulking, inks, adhesives, insulating material for electric equipment, and other materials. PCBs were used because they are resistant to acids, bases and heat, so they were a sturdy material for manufacturing and building materials. Their use was restricted in the late 1970s and 1980s due to possible human and environmental risks. These regulations came into effect after the old water treatment plant was built.

Where were PCBs found?

- The PCBs were found while going through the process of decommissioning the old water treatment plant. They were primarily found in exterior coatings and in the caulking around interior windows. The use of PCBs was once common in what are now dated building materials. PCBs are present only in exterior coatings of two old water treatment plant structures (the Sedimentation Basin and Filtration Basin) and interior of the administration building, not the new facility that services our communities today. Small amounts of lead and arsenic were found in building materials, but were not found to have any adverse risk to public health. The City is working under the oversight of the Department of Ecology to safely manage and dispose of any materials containing PCBs above regulatory standards.

Have PCBs ever been found in the City's drinking water?

- No. The City has tested the water since the 1970s and no level of PCBs has ever been detected. This remains true today.

When did the City learn about the PCBs?

- In 2015, while conducting a demolition assessment of the old Anacortes Water Treatment Plant that is no longer in use.

What tests were conducted to determine the levels of PCB?

- Intertox Inc., a leading independent toxicology consulting company, completed a Human Health Risk Assessment of the old water treatment facility and the surrounding environment. This assessment determined the nature and extent of PCBs and other compounds and was informed by other studies, including a 2015 Remedial Investigation Initial Investigation and 2016 Data Gap Investigation completed by Stantec (formerly D/B/A MWH Americas, Inc.) to provide data to determine the appropriate means of testing and drinking water testing conducted since the 1970s. In 2019, Anchor QEA, LLC, performed additional testing of building materials to further understand the extent of contamination in building materials.

Could someone have come in contact with the PCBs?

- The possibility of exposure was and continues to be exceedingly low. The typical assumed possibilities of exposure considered in environmental risk assessments include: incidental ingestion of soil, sediment, dust, water or other material; physical contact with soil sediments dust or other materials; and breathing volatilized substances or windblown dust. As the Human Health Risk Assessment determined, no adverse health effects are likely to have occurred to workers, customers, or visitors at the old water treatment plant.

What do current and former Plant employees need to know? Could someone working at the plant have come in contact with PCBs?

- The Human Health Risk Assessment determined that no adverse health effects are likely to have occurred to workers, customers or visitors at the old water treatment plant. The possibility of exposure was and continues to be exceedingly low.

What is the next step to proceed with the cleanup of PCBs?

- We have worked under the Department of Ecology’s oversight to establish a remediation strategy to safely manage and dispose of any materials containing PCBs above regulatory standards.

Will the cleanup protect human health, drinking water, and the environment?

- Yes. The City is committed to the most practicable permanent remedial action to protect human health and the environment.
- The FS proposed alternative will involve the full removal of soils exceeding the MTCA residential cleanup level for PCBs; this alternative is supported by Department of Ecology
- While studies show no current risk to human health, the City plans to demolish the old water treatment plant structures with PCB exterior coatings to achieve a permanent source control action and prepare the area for potential redevelopment

How will the City keep its customers and the public informed about the cleanup process?

- The City and Plant officials will continue to work with the Department of Ecology to keep customers and the public informed about the cleanup process. For more information, please visit www.safeandcleanwater.com.

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