



**UTILITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY ACT NO.11
OF 2007
WATER SAFETY STANDARD**

Notice No. **317** of 2026

In the exercise of the powers on the Utilities Regulatory Authority by section 14 of the Utilities Regulatory Act No.11 of 2007 the Authority hereby issues these Revised Regulatory Standards on Water Safety.

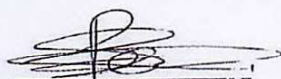
1. Revocation and Replacement

This Revised Water Safety Standard repeals and replaces the Water Safety Standard published as Notice No. 103 in Gazette No. 58 of 2026.

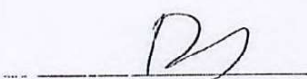
2. Commencement

This Revised Standard comes into effect on the date on which it is gazetted.

Made at Port Vila, this 4th day of September 2026


Jesse Benjamin
Chief Executive Officer
& Executive Commissioner




David Warfe
Commissioner


Jerry Sim Lapi
Chairperson

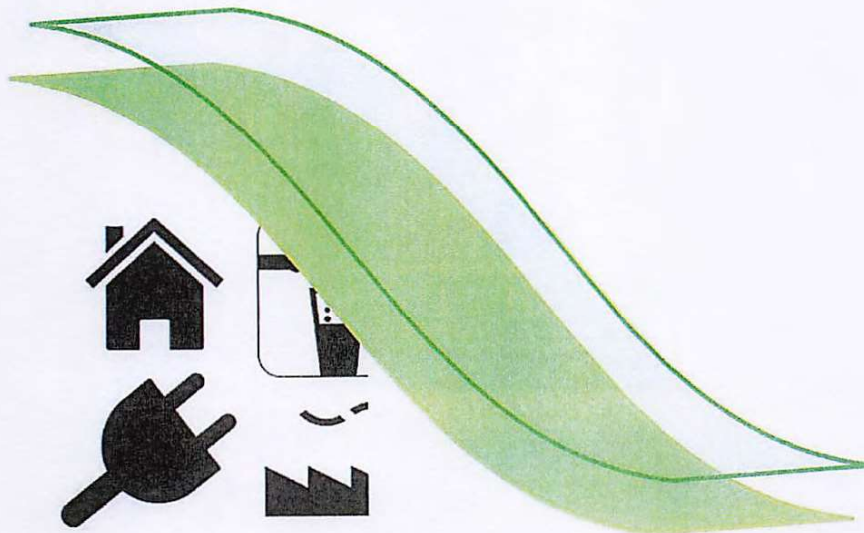


Authority's Commission Order

Case S-0001-25

Water Safety Standard

The Authority's Water Safety Standard for ensuring the safe supply of drinking water by water utilities to customers



June 2026

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Utilities Regulatory Authority (the Authority), established under the *Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007*, is mandated to ensure the provision of safe, reliable, and affordable regulated services to the people of Vanuatu. In accordance with this mandate and Strategic Objective 2 of the URA Strategic Plan (2022-2026) — “*Regulated services are safer*” — the Authority has developed this Water Safety Standard to strengthen the regulatory framework governing the supply of water services throughout Vanuatu.

Access to safe drinking water remains a challenge in several parts of the country. Many utilities and small water suppliers continue to experience operational, infrastructure, and quality challenges, often without a consistent regulatory mechanism to assess or enforce compliance. While the URA Act provides the Authority with powers to regulate safety in relation to water services, there has been no water safety standard to guide regulated entities.

This Standard therefore establishes a clear and practical framework to:

- Protect the health of consumers and the environment by promoting safe water supply operations.
- Provide utilities with measurable minimum requirements and progressive targets for improvement.
- Support URA's inspection and enforcement activities to ensure continuous compliance.
- Align national practice with international benchmarks such as the World Health Organization (WHO) Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality (2022) and the Sustainable Development Goal 6.1 on safely managed drinking water.

The development of this Standard responds to long-standing regulatory gaps identified through the Authority's experience, where utilities often show reluctance to promptly address safety issues reported by the URA. This largely stems from the absence of clearly defined safety requirements and a transparent enforcement process outlining the steps the Authority may take in cases of ongoing non-compliance. This Standard therefore establishes both the safety requirements and the enforcement framework under the URA Act, enabling the Authority to take consistent, proportionate, and transparent action where safety risks are identified.

Ultimately, the Water Safety Standard supports the national objective of ensuring that all people in Vanuatu have access to safe, reliable, and sustainable drinking water services, consistent with the Government's National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP 2016-2030) and the Vanuatu National Water Policy (2018-2030).

2 DEFINITIONS

2.1 Safe / Safety

As defined under the *Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007*, *safe* or *safety* refers to the risk of—

- serious injury or death to any individual; or
- serious environmental pollution; or
- serious damage to critical infrastructure.

2.2 Safely Managed Drinking Water

Consistent with the WHO / UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) definition, safely managed drinking water means an *improved source* that is:

- **Accessible on premises** – water is available at the household or point of use;
- **Available when needed** – supply is continuous and reliable; and
- **Free from contamination** – water meets established safety standards.

2.3 Regulated Service

A service that falls under URA's mandate as defined in the *URA Act No. 11 of 2007*, including the supply, distribution, and sale of electricity and water.

2.4 Utility / Service Provider

A legal entity licensed or recognised by the Government to provide regulated water services within a concession or designated service area. This includes concessionaires, government-operated systems, and private small water suppliers.

2.5 Small Water Supplier (SWS)

A privately operated water supply system—often within a residential subdivision or small community—supplying multiple customers outside a main concession boundary.

2.6 Consumer / Customer

Any individual, household, or organization that receives water services from a regulated utility or supplier.

2.7 Drinking Water Safety and Security Plan (DWSSP)

A documented risk-management plan that identifies potential hazards to water quality and reliability and outlines preventive and corrective measures from catchment to consumer.

2.8 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

A written document describing step-by-step activities and responsibilities to ensure consistent and safe operation of a water supply system.

2.9 Non-Revenue Water (NRW)

The percentage of produced water that does not generate revenue due to physical losses (leakages), commercial losses (illegal connections or metering errors), or unbilled authorised consumption.

3 SCOPE

3.1 Purpose of the Standard

This Water Safety Standard establishes the minimum safety requirements for the provision of regulated water services in Vanuatu. It aims to ensure that water supplied to consumers is safe for human consumption, accessible, reliable, and resilient to both operational and environmental risks. The Standard provides a uniform regulatory framework to guide utilities, operators, and the URA in implementing, monitoring, and enforcing safety across all levels of water service provision.

3.2 Legal Basis

This Standard is issued under subsection 14(1) of the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act (No. 11 of 2007), which empowers the Authority to establish and enforce standards "in relation to the safety of a regulated service in any place". Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the Act operate together as the statutory framework for safety standards, safety orders and safety inspections. This Standard does not amend, replace, or terminate any concession agreement, nor does it transfer to the URA powers assigned by law to another public authority. It is to be applied, as far as possible, consistently with the Water Supply Act, the Water Resources Management Act, the Public Health Act, the Vanuatu National Drinking Water Quality Standards and applicable concession obligations.

3.3 Coverage and Applicability

This Standard applies to all regulated water service providers operating within the jurisdiction of the URA, including:

1. **Small Water Suppliers (SWS):**
Privately operated systems established primarily in peri-urban subdivisions or residential developments outside concession boundaries.
2. **Government Water Supply Systems:**
Systems operated by Government Departments, provincial councils, or public institutions.
3. **Concessionaires:**
Utilities operating under concession agreements with the Government of Vanuatu (e.g., UNELCO Engie).

This Standard does not cover non-regulated community or household systems that fall outside of the URA's definition of a regulated service, and except where the Authority may provide technical guidance upon request from relevant government agencies.

3.4 Reference to National and International Standards and Policies

The standard was developed based on the following national and international benchmarks:

- WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality (2022)
- SDG 6.1 indicators (safely managed water)
- NSDP ECO 2.2 Ensure safe water services for all; SOC 3.2 reduces communicable diseases; and SOC 6.6 strengthen physical planning to meeting the needs of a growing population
- URA Act (No. 11 of 2007)
- Water Supply Act (No.9 of 1985)
- Water Resources Management Act (Act No.9 of 2002) and (Cap 281)
- Vanuatu National Water Policy (2018-2030)
- Water Conservation Act (Act No.9 of 2002)
- Public Health Act (Act No.22 of 1994) (Part 7)
- Pollution (Control) Act 2013 (Act No. 10 of 2013)

- Vanuatu's National Drinking Water Quality (VNDWQ) Standards (Part A) – For Institutional water supply systems.

4 HOW TO USE THE STANDARD

4.1 Structure of the Standard

Each section of the Standard is organized around **objectives** and **minimum requirements**:

- **Objectives:**
Describe the intent and purpose of each component of the Standard and why compliance is necessary.
- **Minimum Requirements (MR):**
Define the mandatory baseline conditions that every water supplier must achieve at all times. There are:
 - **Mandatory Minimum Standards.** Non-compliance with these requirements constitutes a breach under the URA Act or associated legislation (Water Resources Management Act and Vanuatu's National Drinking Water Quality (VNDWQ) Standards).
 - **Other Minimum Standards.** Non-compliance with these requirements leads to a process of notification and required improvements by water suppliers before constituting a breach under the URA Act.

4.2 Enforcement of the Standard

The Authority shall enforce this Standard in accordance with the provisions of the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007. Requirements in this Standard that directly relate to the safety of a regulated service—defined in the Act as risks of serious injury or death, serious environmental pollution, or serious damage to critical infrastructure and will be enforced through Sections 21, 25 and 25 of the Act.

When safety issues are identified through inspections or customer reports, the Authority will notify the utility to take corrective action within a specified timeframe. If the utility fails to respond or act, a Safety Order will be issued, and continued non-compliance may result in an Infringement Notice with penalties.

The Authority will require and enforce the submission of information, reports and data only in accordance with the applicable powers and procedures under the URA Act.

The determination of penalties related to the requirements in this Standard are provided in Section 6.

5 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

5.1 MANDATORY STANDARDS

Non-compliance with these requirements constitutes a breach under the URA Act.

5.1.1 Water quality

Objective: Protect user's health and the environment, and ensure reliable access, enough at any time and sustainably over the years.

Minimum requirements for water quality are:

MR 1 – Free chlorine residual shall be maintained between 0.2 mg/L and 0.5 mg/L after treatment and within the distribution network. It shall be tested quarterly at the point where treated water enters the network and at a point of use. If the residual is below 0.2 mg/L, corrective action shall be taken and retesting conducted within three days to confirm compliance.

(Note: justification of an adequate alternative disinfection method may be considered by the URA.)

MR 2 – E. Coli levels shall not be detected (0 CFU/100mL), and testing shall be conducted quarterly at the source and at a point of use within the network.

MR 3 – Total Coliforms shall not be detected (0 CFU/100mL), and testing shall be conducted quarterly at the source and at a point of use within the network.

MR 4 – Turbidity shall be ≤ 1 NTU, and testing shall be conducted quarterly at the source and at a point of use in the network.

MR5 – Conductivity shall be < 1200 μ S/cm and testing shall be conducted quarterly at the source and at a point of use within the network.

MR6 – Fluoride concentration shall be ≤ 1.5 mg/L, and testing shall be conducted annually at the source.

5.1.2 Adequate water catchment protection

Objective: Support the use of lawfully authorised water sources and the protection of catchments, while recognising responsibilities under other jurisdictions.

Minimum requirements for water catchment protection are:

MR 7 – The supplier shall retain evidence of its declaration or gazettal of the Water protection zone for its water source. The Authority will refer any missing documentation to the Department of Water Resources (DoWR).

MR 8 – The supplier shall retain evidence of permits issued by the DoWR for new boreholes. The Authority will refer any missing documentation to the DoWR.

MR 9 – The supplier shall retain evidence of licenses issued by the DoWR for existing and new sources used for commercial purposes. The Authority will refer any missing documentation to the DoWR.

5.1.3 Preventive Risk Management

Objective: Identify and mitigate safety risks for the water system, using a risk-based approach and preventive maintenance mindset.

Minimum requirements for effective planning are:

MR 10 – Risk-Based Water Safety Management

Water Suppliers shall implement structured preventive risk management for drinking water safety through **either a Water Safety Plan (WSP) OR a URA Risk and Improvement Plan**, as follows:

(a) Water Safety Plan (WSP)

An existing Water Safety Plan shall include:

- Details of the Water Safety Plan team responsible for developing and implementing the plan;
- A description of the water supply system;
- Identification of the hazards affecting the quality, continuity or safety of the water supplied;
- Steps to be taken to manage risks to the quality of the water supplied;
- Emergency preparedness & response plans, including the procedures for responding to contamination, drought, flood, equipment failure or natural disasters;
- Measures to increase the resilience of water supply based on long-term climate trends and appropriate investments that increase water access.

The Water Safety Plan (WSP) should be approved by the DoWR and reviewed annually.

Appendix 1: WSP template

(b) URA Risk and Improvement Plan (Where no approved WSP exists)

Where a supplier does not yet have a DoWR-approved WSP, the supplier shall comply with MR10 as follows:

- Identified safety hazards and proposed Improvement Plan prepared by URA following its inspection will be shared with the supplier for feedback prior to sign-off;
- The safety hazards and Improvement Plan shall be deemed accepted and shall become binding on the supplier where the supplier fails to provide feedback within the timeframe specified by URA;
- URA shall monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan.

5.2 OTHER MINIMUM STANDARDS

Non-compliance with these requirements leads to a process of notification and improvements required by water suppliers before constituting a breach under the URA Act.

5.2.1 Service reliability

Minimum requirements for service reliability are:

MR 11 – Water pressure must be above 1 bar at the water meter or at the level required under applicable concession agreements. Pressure readings must be measured quarterly, and readings shall be submitted to the Authority.

MR 12 – Non-revenue water (NRW), from leakage and illegal connections, is < baseline agreed with URA for each operator; but no more than 50%.

5.2.2 Service resilience

Minimum requirements for service resilience are:

MR 13 – Breakdowns or network damage resulting from utility negligence, including lack of proper maintenance, failure to manage wear and tear, or flaws in the network, that pose a direct safety risk to the water supply or customers shall be addressed immediately.

This requirement applies only under normal operating condition. It does not apply during disruptions caused by natural disasters or force majeure, where issues will need to be addressed in coordination with relevant authorities.

5.2.3 Effective management

Minimum requirements for effective management are:

MR 14 – There is an existing Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) in place. There should be an SOP for **normal** procedures (e.g. chlorination) and for **emergency response** procedures, in case of contamination, drought, flood, equipment failure, or other natural disasters.

Appendix 1: See Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) Template in Module 8 of the Drinking Water Safety and Security Plans (DWSSP) / risk management template

MR 15 – Preventive maintenance is applied to ensure that at least 80% of key assets (pumps, treatment units, reservoirs) are inspected on schedule.

Appendix 1: See Operational Monitoring Template in Module 6 of the Drinking Water Safety and Security Plans (DWSSP) Template

5.2.4 Communication and Reporting

Minimum requirements for communication and reporting are:

MR 16 – Consumer complaints related to water safety issues are logged and investigated within 24 hours.

MR 17 – Quarterly water quality testing results are submitted to the Authority.

MR 18 – There is an early warning and incident notification system in place and real-time SMS/radio alerts are sent out during contamination events, explaining how and when users are informed of contamination events, boil-water advisories, or outages.

5.2.5 Inspection

Minimum requirements for inspection and enforcement procedures are:

MR 19 – Operators shall be available for inspections undertaken by the URA and collaborating authorities at least once a year, subject to sufficient notice. URA may conduct unannounced spot checks if compliance doubts arise.

6 PENALTIES FRAMEWORK

This section establishes the penalty framework that the Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA) will apply for any breach of the Minimum Requirements (MR) defined in this Water Safety Standard.

The framework ensures that penalties are fair and transparent, taking into account the type of risk, the severity of the breach, number of customers affected, and impact on public health, safety, and the environment.

Penalties will be imposed in accordance with Sections 21 to 26 of the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007, which empower the Authority to issue infringement notices, apply penalties, and take enforcement actions for breaches of safety or reliability standards.

Six months grace period of grace will apply between the publication of the Standards and their full implementation.

6.1 Determining the Penalty Amount

Penalties are determined based on the severity level of the risks and potential impact link, as outlined in the table below. Each severity level has an associated penalty range, within which the exact amount is determined using objective criteria.

Severity Level	Penalty Range (VUV)
Very Low	50,000 – 150,000
Low	150,000 – 400,000
Moderate	400,000 – 700,000
High	700,000 – 1,000,000
Extreme	1,000,000 – 3,000,000

Figure 1: Severity Table and Penalty Amounts

6.2 Severity Classification by Requirement

The following table links each Minimum Requirement (MR) to its corresponding severity level based on the type of risk and potential impact explained in Section 6.1.

Section / Requirement	Type of Risk / Breach	Severity Level
1. Water Quality		
MR1 – Maintain between 0.2 mg/L and 0.5mg/L of free chlorine residual	Low chlorine - unsafe water	Moderate
MR2 – E. Coli =0 CFU /100 mL	Microbial contamination-Unsafe water	Extreme
MR3 – Total Coliforms = 0 CFU/100mL	Microbial contamination-Unsafe water	Extreme
MR 4 – Turbidity ≤NTU	Physical contamination-Unsafe water	Low
MR 5 – Conductivity < 1200 µS/cm	Physical contamination-Unsafe water	Low
MR 6 – Fluoride = 1.5 mg/L	Chemical contamination-Unsafe water	Moderate
3.Preventive Risk Management		
MR10 – Water Safety Plan in place or URA Improvement Plan	No safety plan or URA Improvement plan	High
4. Service Reliability		
MR11 – Pressure >1 bar or as per concession agreement	Low pressure allowing contamination	Moderate
MR12 – NRW <30%	Leakage or illegal connections	Low
5. Service Resilience		
MR13 – Immediate repairs of breakdown and network damage	Delay in infrastructure repair	High
6. Effective Management		
MR14 – SOP in place	No standard operating procedure	High
MR15 – Preventive maintenance ≥80%	Neglected maintenance	Moderate
7. Communication & Reporting		
MR16 – Safety complaints acknowledged <24h	Unresolved complaints	Moderate
MR17 – Submit quarterly water quality testing results	Late or no reports	High
MR18 – Early warning systems and notification to water quality incident	No hazard alerts	High
8. Inspection & Enforcement		
MR19 – Annual URA inspection	Non-cooperation or delay	Moderate

6.3 Rationale of the Severity Level

The severity level associated with each potential breach were analysed, based on the nature of the risk (eg. Health and Safety, Environmental or Legal and Governance Risks), as follows:

Severity Level	Health & Safety Risks	Environmental Risks	Legal & Governance Risks
1(Insignificant)	No payment or first-aid only	Minimal and short-term impacts on biological or physical environment	Low level legal issues, internal policy
2(Minor)	Medical treatment beyond first-aid with short term impacts < 1 month	Noticeable change to biological, physical environment or species < 1 month	Breach of regulation, legislation or contracts; Non-compliances
3(Moderate)	Temporary impairment with moderate term impact < 2 years	Moderate change or impact on biological, physical environment or species <2 years. Moderate short-medium term widespread impacts (e.g. significant tailings spill).	Serious breach of regulation, legislation or contract with fines
4(Major)	Long term disability with long term impacts 2-10 years	Long term, widespread effects on biological, physical environment, ecosystems or species 2-10 years	Major breach of regulation, legislation or contract with litigation or liability
5(Extreme)	One or more fatalities or permanent disability > 10 years	Irreversible changes to biological, physical environment, ecosystems or species > 10 years. Widespread effects on significant environment (e.g. unique habitat)	Very serious breach of regulation, legislation or contract with fines and serious litigation including class actions

7 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Water Safety / risk management template

The following templates can be used by water utilities, using the WHO Water Safety Plan Manual, available online at [Water safety plan manual: step-by-step risk management for drinking-water suppliers, second edition](#) and the National Drinking Water Security and Safety Plan (DWSSP), available on the DoWR's website: [20210608 - DWSSP Participants Guide.pdf](#).

- Section 2A: Description of the current water supply system (written)
- Section 2B: Description of the current water supply system (map)
- Section 2C: Description of the current water supply system (performance measures)
- Section 3: Identification of hazards
- [Module 4: Risk assessment table template](#)
- [Module 5: Improvement plan template](#)
- [Module 6: Operational monitoring templates](#), including a preventive maintenance template.
- [Module 7: Compliance monitoring template](#)
- [Module 8: Management procedure templates](#), including a Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) template.

Tools and templates	Online reference
Module 1: WSP team membership and meeting templates	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual
Section 2: Description of the current water supply system	National Drinking Water Security and Safety Plan (DWSSP)
Module 4: Risk assessment table template	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual
Module 5: Improvement plan template	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual
Module 6: Operational monitoring templates , including a preventive maintenance template.	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual
Module 7: Compliance monitoring template	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual
Module 8: Management procedure templates , including a Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) template	WHO Water Safety Plan Manual

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