



guardians of drinking water quality
DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Animals in Water

In England and Wales over 50% of drinking water is derived from surface water i.e. rivers and reservoirs. Surface water may contain small plants (algae) and animals, all of which are present in a healthy aquatic environment.

When surface water is treated, the vast majority of these animals and plants are removed. However there are some occasions when animals and algae can pass through water filters and enter the water distribution system, which conveys water to homes and workplaces.

There are also some harmless animals which live within water mains. On rare occasions these may be noticed by consumers in a glass of water drawn from their tap.

These animals and algae are normally not visible to the naked eye, however certain species such as *Asellus* (fresh water shrimps) or *Chironomids* (midge fly larvae) are slightly larger and may be seen without a microscope.

These animals are harmless and do not pose any risk to human health. They are part of the natural environment and an essential part of the ecosystem. Indeed many are 'indicators' of healthy, good quality rivers, lakes and streams.

Water companies are required, on aesthetic grounds, to take steps to ensure animals do not accumulate in such numbers that they appear in tap water.

Last Updated: October 2009