

Puerto Rico drinking water is worst in US: report

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The US territory of Puerto Rico has the worst drinking water in the nation, and the majority of the island's water supply is in violation of federal standards, a report said Wednesday.

Nearly every person in Puerto Rico—99.5 percent of the population—was served by water systems that had violations in 2015, including failure to test for contaminants or [report](#) problems to the public, said the report by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group.

"Puerto Rico suffers the worst rate of [drinking water](#) violations of any state or territory in the United States," said co-author Erik Olson, director of NRDC Health Program.

More than 2.4 million people in 2015—or 69.4 percent of the population in Puerto Rico—got their water from community water systems that violated the federal health-based standards, said the report, based on data from Puerto Rico's Department of Health.

Nearly half of the island's [water systems](#) were found to have violations that included "unlawfully high levels of contaminants such as volatile organic compounds, total coliform bacteria, and disinfection byproducts," or otherwise broke water treatment rules, said the report.

These contaminants can cause cancer, birth defects and cognitive impairments.

"We found that there are serious problems with outdated and deteriorating water infrastructure, and poor implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act," said Olson.

Problems also include "poor enforcement by states and territorial governments and the EPA, under-reporting of violations, and frankly, weaknesses in [drinking water standards](#) for contaminant like arsenic and lead," he told reporters on a conference call.

Increased investment is needed for [drinking](#) water infrastructure, which could protect people's health and create jobs fixing Puerto Rico's water system, the report said.

Olson warned that deep cuts proposed by the White House to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could further harm the water supply.

"The Trump administration has proposed massive budget cuts that could make the problem worse nationally, and particularly worse in Puerto Rico," he said.

These include slashing nearly a third of the EPA, and eliminating \$500 million in funding for rural drinking [water](#) supplies and sewers.

"That would hit rural areas very badly," he said.

Earlier this month, the governor of Puerto Rico announced the US territory would seek a form of bankruptcy protection to restructure its \$70 billion debt, the largest municipal restructuring in US history.

By declaring bankruptcy, the US commonwealth in the Caribbean can prevent any interruption in services to island residents, Governor Ricardo Rossello said.

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