EWG SMART PICKS

Drinking water filters

SUBMISSION CRITERIA FOR BRANDS

A single recognition standard – EWG has reviewed the evidence

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What is EWG Smart Picks?

EWG Smart Picks is a single-standard product recognition program. A water filter earns the Smart Picks designation when a brand submits certification and test results that EWG confirms meet the criteria below.

There is no application fee. The review process relies on documentation provided at intake and on publicly verifiable certification registries. EWG confirms the submission meets our criteria; we do not commission independent tests.

Product scope

This standard applies to point-of-use residential water filters: pitcher, countertop, refrigerator, under-sink carbon, and reverse osmosis systems. Details about the standard include:

- **Unit of recognition:** a specific filter system and its cartridge model
- **Does not apply to:** whole-house filters or components sold separately.
- NSF/WQA/IAPMO R&T certification and accredited laboratory results are the verification backbone of this standard.

Qualification rule

To earn EWG Smart Picks, a water filter product line must hold at least one current NSF/ANSI, WQA, or IAPMO R&T certification, verifiable on the applicable public registry. Filters must have ISO/IEC 17025-accredited laboratory testing results for PFAS, disinfection byproducts, lead and at least two additional qualifying contaminant categories. The laboratory accreditation must cover the specific NSF/ANSI protocols utilized in the testing.

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- **All product lines must hold current certification or accredited testing results for all three contaminant categories Group A:**
    - PFAS (PFOA and PFOS, at a minimum), *and*
    - Disinfection byproducts, *and*
    - Lead
- **All product lines must currently be certified or have accredited testing results for at least 2 contaminant categories from Groups B, C or D in any combination.**

In addition, for **every** EWG contaminant category a product is certified or tested for, the listing must disclose the percentage reduction achieved.

Certification and disclosure requirements

Criteria	Requirement
Certification held	• Any NSF/ANSI 53, NSF/ANSI 58 (RO), NSF/ANSI 42 (aesthetic only) or an equivalent WQA, IAPMO R&T certification. NSF/ANSI 42 (aesthetic only) does not count toward any category. • Certification must be current and verifiable on the NSF,WQA, or IAPMO R&T public registry. • Whole-unit certification is required; component-only certification is not sufficient.
Accredited testing result disclosure	• For every category supported by testing rather than certification, the public listing must link directly to the underlying lab report. • The linked report must state: the accredited lab's name and accreditation scope, influent concentration, test volume/duration relative to the product's rated capacity, whether each claimed compound was directly measured or extrapolated from a surrogate, and the test date.
Qualifying coverage	• **Accredited testing results (ISO/IEC 17025-accredited lab, specific NSF/ANSI protocol)** for Group A (PFAS, disinfection byproducts, lead) *and* for at least 2 categories drawn from Groups B, C and D (see matrix below).

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Criteria	Requirement
Percentage-reduction disclosure	• For every category a product is certified or tested for, the public listing must state the percentage reduction achieved and the influent concentration tested. • This requirement applies whether the test result used to support a contaminant category is certified or non-certified. No category may be claimed without a percentage-reduction figure.
End-of-life performance	• Filter rated use-life must be stated in gallons or months. Provide or refer to data showing reduction performance holds through the rated cartridge life.

EWG contaminant categories

Groups A–D

This matrix defines the categories that count toward Smart Picks qualification. To qualify, your product must:

- Be certified or have accredited laboratory results for each contaminant in Group A.
- Be certified or have accredited laboratory results for at least 2 categories from Groups B, C or D.
- Disclose the percentage reduction for every category your product is certified or tested for.

Category	Group	Counts toward qualification?	Percent reduction and other disclosures
PFAS (long-chain): PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFHxS	A (mandatory)	Yes. NSF 53 or 58 certification/testing covering PFOA and PFOS at minimum.	PFOA and PFOS, with influent concentration tested.
Total trihalomethanes (TTHMs); disinfection byproducts	A (mandatory)	Yes. Certified/tested for TTHM/DBP reduction (NSF 53).	TTHMs, with influent concentration.

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Category	Group	Counts toward qualification?	Percent reduction and other disclosures
Lead	A (mandatory)	Yes. Certified/tested for lead reduction (NSF 53 or 58).	Lead, plus end-of-life performance data.
PFAS (short-chain): PFBS, PFBA, PFHxA, HFPO-DA	B	Counts toward Group A coverage if certified/tested; not separately required.	If certified/tested: % reduction for each short-chain PFAS claimed.
Chromium-6 (hexavalent chromium)	B	Counts toward the "2 from B–D" if certified/tested for Cr-6 reduction.	Cr-6, with influent concentration.
Arsenic	B	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified/tested for arsenic reduction.	Arsenic, with influent concentration.
Nitrate; nitrite	B	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified/tested (NSF 58 or ion exchange).	Nitrate, with influent concentration.
VOCs (benzene, TCE, vinyl chloride); 1,4-dioxane	B	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified/tested for the VOC class (NSF 53).	Representative VOCs, with influent concentration.
Perchlorate	C	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified/tested for perchlorate.	Perchlorate, with influent concentration.
Radiologicals (radium, uranium radon)	C	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified/tested for radiological reduction.	Radiological(s) claimed.

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Category	Group	Counts toward qualification?	Percent reduction and other disclosures
Microplastics – particles and fibers	D	Counts toward "2 from B–D" if certified (NSF/ANSI 401) or RO (NSF 58), or supported by validated third-party particle testing (Py-GC/MS, μFTIR, flow cytometry).	Particles in the tested size range (state size range and method).

Brands should keep in mind that percentage reduction must be disclosed with all claims. A brand may not list a category, even one beyond the required three, without stating the percentage reduction and influent concentration. This prevents vague "reduces PFAS" claims and gives consumers comparable numbers.

What to submit

- ☐ NSF/WQA/IAPMO R&T certification number(s), verifiable on the public registry.
- ☐ The list of certified or accredited laboratory results for categories (Group A plus at least 2 from Groups B, C and D) with public link(s) to underlying lab reports.
- ☐ Percentage reduction figure and influent concentration for every category claimed.
- ☐ Product line and cartridge model list and associated SKUs.
- ☐ End-of-life performance statement.

EWG review process

Step	Action required	Notes about next steps
Apply	Submit the online checklist form with certification numbers and reduction figures.	Intake is automated. Submissions missing required fields (e.g., a required category or a percentage reduction figure) will be rejected and returned for completion.

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Step	Action required	Notes about next steps
Review	Respond to EWG requests for additional information, if any, within 10 business days.	EWG verifies certification number(s) on the NSF/WQA/IAPMO R&T public registry and reviews linked lab reports for any category supported by testing rather than certification to confirm Group A plus 2 additional categories are covered, each with a percentage reduction figure.
List	Provide product line and model information and photography.	EWG creates your Smart Picks listing, including category coverage and reduction figures.
Renew	Annually confirm certification is current or update data, if the filter design or media changes.	EWG sends an automated reminder 60 days before renewal is due then confirms your attestation or reviews new data.

Staying current: Annual review

- Brands must confirm annually if the required certifications remain current.
- If the filter design or filter media changes, or 5 years have passed since the product was tested, brands must submit updated data.
- EWG may ask a brand to respond to credible, independent third-party findings about a listed product. Brands have 30 days to respond with data; the listing is publicly flagged 'Under review' in the interim.

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A note on terminology

The term “Reduction” is used throughout this standard, because no filter achieves 100% removal of any contaminant. All percentage reduction figures should be understood and disclosed on that basis, alongside the influent concentration used in tests.

For microplastics specifically: As of this standard’s publication, no single drinking-water microplastics test method has been formally adopted industry-wide. Any validated method is accepted, provided the method, detection limit and particle size range are stated in your submission.

Note that nanoplastics (under 1 micron) are rarely characterized by current test methods. If a product claims microplastic reduction, be explicit about the particle size range the test(s) cover.

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