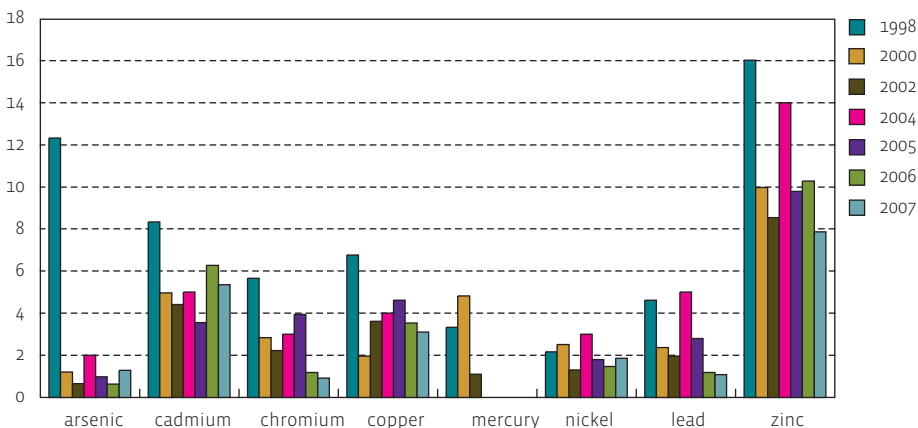




measurement points with standard exceedance (%)



Source: VMM

Percentage of standard exceedances relatively limited, but ...

Between 1998 and 2002 the percentage of measurement locations with an exceedance of the basic quality standard for heavy metals dropped considerably. Since then, the trend has been less clear. In some cases the cause of a sudden increase in the percentage of standard exceedances can be specifically identified (e.g. incidental discharging of cadmium in the Meuse in 2006). Further, meteorological conditions probably play a major role. In wet years more dilution occurs and the surface water quality is generally better. Moreover not all of the measurement locations are necessarily sampled annually and the number of measurement locations varies. Both factors partially influence changes in the percentage of measurement locations with standard exceedances.

For zinc and cadmium the most exceedances are observed at present. In contrast to zinc, too high a concentration of cadmium is a problem that is mostly strongly localized in the Campines as a result of the previous activities in the zinc industry. The exceedances for zinc are very spread out across Flanders. Households (especially zinc building materials) and diffuse sources (e.g. car tyre wear and soil erosion) play a major role in zinc pollution.

Although the number of standard exceedances for heavy metals in surface water is relatively low, this does not mean that they cannot be a problem in the aquatic environment. Heavy metals are inclined to accumulate in the watercourse sediment where they can remain present for many years.