

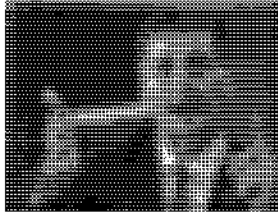
Sygo, Jim (DEQ)

From: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ)
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2015 10:49 PM
To: Wyant, Dan (DEQ); Pallone, Maggie (DEQ); Sygo, Jim (DEQ); Krisztian, George (DEQ)
Cc: Tommasulo, Karen (DEQ); Wurfel, Sara (GOV); Murray, David (GOV); Muchmore, Dennis (GOV); Jarrod Agen; Clement, Elizabeth (GOV)
Subject: Fwd: det news

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/environment/2015/10/18/deq-mistakes/74198882/>

Michigan DEQ vows changes in Flint water crisis

Jim Lynch, The Detroit News 8:31 p.m. EDT October 19, 2015



(Photo: Dale G. Young / The Detroit News)

Michigan's top environmental official acknowledged the state made mistakes in its handling of Flint's long-running water crisis, and said changes would be made, including reassigning a top official responsible for the safety of drinking water.

Dan Wyant, director of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality, said late Sunday that staff members applied the wrong standards of the Lead and Copper Rule that governs testing and monitoring for drinking water. The result was that proper controls regarding corrosion were not put in place when the city began drawing its water from the Flint River in spring 2014.

"Our actions reflected inexperience, and our public response to criticism was the wrong tone early in this conversation," Wyant said. "But the best we can do with the situation going forward is represented in our present course. ... We will learn from this. We will make necessary changes to see to it that our program becomes a national leader in (lead) protection."

The changes will include the reassignment of Liane Shekter Smith, chief of DEQ's Office of Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance. Gov. Rick Snyder will also introduce an independent, third-party review of the state's handling of Flint's water issues.

Wyant's announcement comes after months of rising concerns among Flint residents over the safety of their drinking water and lead contamination. It also comes after the recent release of inter-agency communications relating to Flint's situation that demonstrate confusion behind the scenes.

State officials seemingly failed to heed repeated warnings from the Environmental Protection Agency as far back as February about potential problems with Flint's water system.

Communications released this week between the federal agency and DEQ also show how an environmental law designed to protect the public allowed the government to utilize questionable water testing practices and move slowly in addressing problems, all while remaining "in compliance" with regulations.

Critics hold the state responsible for the current situation, since Snyder's appointed emergency manager was in charge when the decision was made to begin drawing water from the Flint River in 2014 to save money. State officials have said that move was a "city decision."

Problems began then, including residents saying tap water had strange coloring, smell and taste. In the last month, those concerns were dramatically heightened by studies that show lead levels in some children have risen since the switch from Detroit's water system. Those studies showed that, in some areas, lead levels in children's blood samples have doubled and, in two ZIP codes, tripled.

Many opportunities missed

Emails and letters released by the state this week show many missed opportunities for health and environmental agencies to identify the lead problems months ago.

In February, an EPA official assessing Flint's situation raised several concerns with DEQ, particularly with the way the state conducted testing to ensure water coming into city homes was safe to drink. Such testing is required by the federal Lead and Copper Rule.

"Particulate lead release is a normal part of the corrosion process and it is universal (common) in all systems," wrote Miguel Del Toral, regulations manager for EPA's Region 5, in a Feb. 27 email to two DEQ staffers.

"It's just that it's not captured as often by the infrequent (Lead and Copper Rule) sampling. If systems are pre-flushing the tap the night before collecting ... samples ... (MDEQ still provides these instructions to public water systems) this clears particulate lead out of the plumbing and biases the results low by eliminating the highest lead values. ...

"The particulate lead is being flushed away before collecting compliance samples which provides false assurance to resident about the true lead levels in the water."

Del Toral would repeat the same concerns in a widely publicized unofficial memo in April. But at each step along the way, city and officials responded to testing queries by saying their approach met federal guidelines. As recently as Sept. 3, Flint's Public Works Director Howard Croft supported the testing methods used.