



Statement on Internal Investigation regarding the cause of the DEP boil water advisory for potential contamination

As discussed at its June meeting, the Authority Board conducted an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) violation notice related to a potential contamination event at the reservoir. The investigation was led by Board members Mr. Iacoboni and Mr. Anderson, with legal counsel providing guidance throughout the process.

The investigation included interviews with individuals involved in the project and a review of the events that led to the DEP violation. Based on that review, the Board determined that the incident occurred during a specific reservoir project that has since been completed and was not part of an ongoing operational practice. However, the Board recognizes that the incident should not have occurred and that the Authority is responsible for ensuring all work affecting the water system complies with applicable regulations and industry standards.

Subsequent water quality testing found no evidence of contamination, and the Authority is grateful that the incident did not result in adverse impacts to public health. Once the Authority became aware of the issue, boil water procedures were implemented, the system was flushed, and testing was conducted in accordance with established protocols. The Board appreciates the efforts of Authority employees who responded to the situation and helped carry out those measures.

The Board also heard concerns from residents regarding the timeliness and effectiveness of boil water advisory notifications. Those concerns are valid. While notification efforts were made, the Authority recognizes that not all customers received information as quickly or reliably as they should have. As a result, the Authority is reviewing and improving its communication procedures, including updating customer contact information and evaluating additional notification methods to ensure residents receive critical information promptly in the future.

In addition, residents and council from North Belle Vernon raised concerns about whether water line flushing affected fire protection capabilities within the Borough. The Authority consulted with its engineer and confirmed that, even during the flushing operations conducted in May, sufficient water pressure remained available for firefighting purposes. The Board understands why residents sought clarification on this issue and believes it is important to provide accurate information so the public can have confidence in the reliability of the system.

So, what have we learned about how this happened? The investigation found that the primary cause of the violation was a contractor's misunderstanding of sanitation requirements for equipment used in or around drinking water infrastructure. The Board also concluded that the issue could have been prevented through stronger project oversight, clearer communication of regulatory requirements, and earlier involvement of qualified professionals in project planning and review. While the investigation found no evidence of intentional misconduct, it did identify shortcomings in the Authority's oversight processes. The Board accepts responsibility for addressing those weaknesses.

To prevent a similar incident from occurring again, the Authority will review and strengthen its policies governing contractor selection, contractor oversight, and regulatory compliance. The Board will also evaluate procedures to ensure that professional consultants, including the Authority's engineer, are involved at the earliest stages of projects that may affect water system operations or DEP compliance requirements.

Additionally, the Board will consider establishing protocols to provide day-to-day oversight of Authority activities, improve project management, and help ensure compliance with applicable regulations and best practices.

The Authority is committed to learning from this incident and restoring public confidence through transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. The Board will continue to discuss these matters in public meetings and provide updates on corrective actions as they are implemented.

The Authority will not comment on specific personnel matters related to this incident. Any employment-related matters will remain confidential as required by law and established personnel practices.