

Michigan governor calls out National Guard over Flint water crisis

A WSWS reporting team
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Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has dispatched National Guard troops to Flint as part of the “response efforts” over the lead-poisoning crisis in the city of 100,000 residents, 60 miles north of Detroit. At the same time, the governor requested support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) “to coordinate an interagency recovery plan with other federal agencies to provide resources to Flint.”

Some Guardsmen arrived in Flint on Wednesday and were assisting at the fire stations designated as “water resources sites” to hand out bottled water and lead filters to residents. Snyder’s office says that by Friday, there will be more than 30 National Guard personnel functioning in the city.

The lead poisoning of the population of Flint is a direct result of cost-cutting measures implemented recklessly by the state-installed emergency manager. The “EM” was working under the jurisdiction of an antidemocratic system that was specifically thrown out by Michigan votes in a ballot referendum in 2011. The public, both in and outside Flint are enraged at the actions carried out by state and local authorities, which led to the situation residents face today.

There is little doubt that the presence of troops is also aimed at dissuading public protests against the Republican governor and his local Democratic Party accomplices who are responsible for poisoning city residents.

Children who have been lead poisoned can experience various immediate symptoms including impaired function of internal organs, headaches, anemia and dental problems. Adults can experience hair loss, skin disorders, weakening of teeth and bones and seizures in extreme cases. There is no cure for exposure to lead in the system and no safe level of exposure. Permanent learning and behavioral disorders can arise.

The effects of lead poisoning are likely to affect multiple generations.

On Wednesday, Governor Snyder admitted that the number of potentially fatal cases of Legionnaires’ disease has spiked in Genesee County in the two years since Flint switched its water supply from Detroit’s system, which comes from the Great Lakes, to the Flint River.

After the city made the switch in April 2014, residents complained about the color, smell and taste of their tap water. They were ignored and answered with a state-run conspiracy of lies.

Evidence emerges publicly on a daily basis that authorities had known early on about the health dangers posed by Flint water and yet refused to take any preventative measures or even warn the public about the health danger in drinking the water.

The measures being taken by the state of Michigan now are largely viewed by residents as a publicity stunt—political damage control—to protect Snyder so that his administration can return to “business as usual.”

A WSWS reporting team went to Flint Wednesday and spoke to residents seeking assistance at fire stations. Robert Russell was at the downtown Flint fire station. “I think that it’s messed up. Nothing is being done for people, especially the kids. What upsets me is there should have been more help. It’s like nobody really cares. They treat us like we don’t really exist.

“I came here with my mother and sister because we don’t have water. It’s really bad. My mother’s husband is sick, and he is a Viet Nam vet. It’s a struggle out here every day just to get by.”

Lora moved to Flint from Grand Rapids, Michigan, but said she didn’t realize how bad it was. “It took too long to get help for people. What bothers me is the kids are struggling.”

To add insult to injury, Lora said her water bill is \$110 a month. “I had a pool in Grand Rapids and the water bill wasn’t this high.”

Water rates for Flint residents are among the highest in the country. The average water bill is \$140 each month. The city is poised to resend 1,800 shutoff notices from last November pending a court case charging Flint water authorities with violating a court order to lower rates.

Brenda Williams, a retired worker from Flint, said that she had to pick up bottled water every day. “My water is still a light yellow in my bathtub. It has been like that a long time. My friend has brown water. Wayne State University came out two weeks ago and tested our water. I still haven’t heard the results from the test. They said they would contact me.”

She expressed anger that, after being poisoned with bad water, residents were still being asked to pay water bills. “This has been going on for over a year. “\$100 a month for bad water?”

Harold Millhouse, a disabled worker, said, “The situation is terrible. The filters are not lasting that long. We have gone through three or four filters in a couple of months.

“My water bill is \$160 a month, and I don’t drink the water. I can’t understand why we have to pay. They were telling us the water was safe to drink. I believed it was safe. It is a crime. Someone needs to be held accountable.

“I am getting headaches. I don’t know where they come from—anxiety or what. They need to correct it soon. They don’t really care for the poor or the middle class.”

Brandee Perigo is a former student at the University of Michigan who is now seeking disability payments. She stopped to talk to the WSWS while picking up bottled water at a fire station on the east side of Flint. “At first it started with pets dying. Veterinarians said it was from the water. It has been taking too long to get help.

“I have had to use food stamps to buy water. It doesn’t last very long. We have to boil water before we cook. This is the first time we have gotten help. Everyone was out of water the first time we came.

“It scares me. What are the long-term effects, especially with complications relating to a compromised immune system? I have fibromyalgia and

now hyperthyroidism. It has put us in a pinch.

“Obviously Snyder, everyone involved in this, needs to be held accountable. It shouldn’t take Cher coming out on TV to have something done. They knew about it for a long time, but they waited until the national media made it an issue. Now it is too late. All our kids are poisoned.

“We are poor. Who cares about us? It is heartbreaking. I am just glad I don’t have kids.

“People are still fishing out of the river, even though it is polluted, just to have some food. People don’t have any idea how bad it is here in Flint.”



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