

Evidence mounts that poisoned Flint water caused deaths

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A hospital associated with the deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in Flint, Michigan was contaminated with Legionella bacteria from the city's tainted water supply, the *Detroit News* reported Friday.

The revelation is further evidence that the decision to provide polluted drinking water from the Flint River to the city's residents—in which the administration of Governor Rick Snyder is deeply implicated—has already had deadly consequences. On January 13, state health officials said that an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease caused 10 people to die and 77 others to become ill.

The news came a day after the federal government opened an investigation into the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) handling of the disaster in Flint, in a sign that the deepening crisis could further implicate the Obama administration.

While about 47 percent of patients who fell ill from Legionnaires' disease drank tainted water from the Flint River, an even larger share had visited McLaren Regional Medical Center hospital, which may have served as an incubator for bacteria from municipal water.

In addition to the deaths from Legionnaire's disease, state officials say that they have identified dozens of people with elevated bloodstream lead levels, while residents report countless other symptoms, including rashes. The city's 100,000 residents, including its 9,000 children, were placed at risk. There is no cure for lead poisoning, and its effects can include reduced IQ and academic performance over the victim's lifetime.

On Friday, Snyder hired a new PR firm, Mercury LLC, to help his administration weather growing demands for his resignation, impeachment and criminal indictment for his administration's complicity in the poisoning of Flint residents.

The governor was in damage control mode Friday,

telling MSNBC that his subordinates in the state's Department of Environmental Quality were to blame for the crisis. "The department people weren't, the heads were not being given the right information by the quote-unquote experts."

Snyder scrambled to defend his record as governor since 2010, declaring, "Flint is a place I've been devoted to helping." He added, "I've made a focused effort since before I started in office to say, we need to work hard to help people that have the greatest need."

Snyder announced the suspension without pay of two employees from the state's Department of Environmental Quality on Friday.

Also Friday, State Representative Sheldon Neeley accused the Snyder administration of hiding some of the governor's correspondence on the issue. On Thursday, Snyder released over 250 pages of documents which he said constituted the totality of his personal correspondence on the Flint water crisis, but Neeley said an email he had written to the governor in January 2015, nine months before the state took action on the issue, warned of "civil unrest" if nothing was done to correct the situation.

The city of Flint started drawing water from the poisoned Flint River in April 2014 after the nearby city of Detroit began charging higher water rates in the aftermath of the city's bankruptcy restructuring. Despite vocal complaints and protests from residents and environmental groups, the city used water from the river for 19 months before growing evidence of lead poisoning forced it to revert back to using Detroit river water in October 2015.

On Thursday, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said that Michigan authorities had failed to adequately respond to the crisis, and that it would begin doing its own tests of the city's drinking water.

EPA head Gina McCarthy wrote in a letter to Snyder that she was “deeply concerned” about “inadequate transparency and accountability” by the state.

This took place even as the federal government announced Thursday that it has opened up an inspector-general’s investigation into the EPA’s handling of the Flint drinking water crisis. The EPA also announced Thursday that its regional head responsible for the six states in the Great Lakes region, including Michigan and Illinois, had resigned.

The EPA and the state environmental department had evidence since at least January 2015 that there were elevated lead levels in Flint’s drinking water, but did nothing to warn the public.

Even as the Snyder administration worked overtime to contain the political fallout from the crisis, the *New York Times* concurrently went into damage control mode for the Obama administration, seeking to lay blame for the disaster solely at Snyder’s feet and presenting the poisoning of Flint’s workers as a racial, not class, issue.

A *Times* article, “A Question of Environmental Racism in Flint,” asked, “If Flint were rich and mostly white, would Michigan’s state government have responded more quickly and aggressively to complaints about its lead-polluted water?”

The article states, “For civil rights advocates, the health crisis in Flint smacks of what has become known as environmental racism.” In a separate article Friday, the newspaper asked “whether the state has overreached in imposing too many emergency managers in largely black jurisdictions.”

In fact, Flint is racially mixed, and the neglect of infrastructure and corporate looting is repeated in city after city throughout the country, affecting workers of all races. The aim of presenting the issue in a racial light is to absolve the local black Democratic Party establishment, as well as the White House, from responsibility for the crisis, despite the fact that the move to use water from the Flint River was supported by the Flint City Council, which is composed largely of Democrats and African-Americans.

The *Times* has also drawn attention to the comments of filmmaker Michael Moore, a longtime apologist for the Obama administration, who has called the disaster “Governor Snyder’s [Hurricane] Katrina.”

While the comparison to Hurricane Katrina is

apt—though in the case of Flint the disaster is entirely man-made—the truth is that it is as much Obama’s Katrina as it is Snyder’s. The White House gave its full support to the Detroit bankruptcy that led to Flint’s decision to disconnect from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, and the Obama administration took no action for months in the face of mounting popular protests and a growing body of scientific evidence that Flint’s water was poisoned.

Indeed, Snyder has been a key ally of Obama in seeking to use the bankruptcy of Detroit to set a precedent for the dismantling of public employee pensions and the hiving off of public assets to speculators such as billionaire Dan Gilbert, the head of Quicken Loans who has bought up large sections of downtown Detroit on the cheap.

The crisis now unfolding over the poisoning of the population in Flint is the outcome of the criminal and antisocial policies pursued by the Obama administration over the past seven years, and by the entire political establishment for decades.



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