

# Flint resident files lawsuit against corporations, officials

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5 March 2016

LeeAnne Walters, the Flint mother who defied the lies and intimidation of state and local officials to help bring to light the lead poisoning of Flint's water, has initiated a lawsuit against companies and individuals she accuses of bearing responsibility for poisoning her children. All four of her children have experience different symptoms from the high levels exposure to the neurotoxin—including stunted growth, brain deficiencies and violent stomach pains.

The suit, filed Thursday in Genesee Circuit Court, names three corporate entities and three state and local officials for their “outrageous conduct.” The companies are engineering firm Lockwood, Andrews & Newnam (LAN), Rowe Engineering and water transnational Veolia. All three companies are accused of professional negligence for not insisting on corrosion control treatment for the city's water.

The lead poisoning began when, on April 25, 2014, the city disconnected from the treated water source provided for decades by Detroit's Lake Huron pipeline and began using the corrosive water from the Flint River without properly applying corrosion control treatment. The protective layer built up on the inner walls of Flint's pipes over decades was eaten away, causing toxic lead to leach into the water flowing through them and into residents' taps.

Houston-based LAN was contracted for almost a million dollars to oversee the refit of Flint's nearly century-old water treatment plant to process water from the Flint River. The company has responded to the filing of Walters' suit by claiming that it “was asked to provide a limited scope of engineering services to address specific components of the existing water treatment plant, not the overall water quality.” According to *Crain's Detroit Business*, the company made “more than \$3.5 million on various city contract

awards since preparing an analysis in 2011 for then-Mayor Dayne Walling about using the Flint River as a water source.”

Rowe Engineering was heavily involved in the preliminary work with the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) plan to build a pipeline for transmitting raw Lake Huron water to Flint and other potential commercial customers. The company has produced several reports on water source options for the city of Flint, including the 2011 report titled “Analysis of the Flint River as a Permanent Water Supply for the City of Flint,” produced jointly with LAN. The KWA project was heavily promoted as the city's best option.

Veolia is a French-based private utility company that has grown dramatically since the 1980s as governments have sought to privatize public water systems. In March of last year, as residents' protests against the foul-smelling and tasting Flint River water exploded, Veolia North America prepared a report on Flint's water. The report never mentioned the danger of lead leaching into the water and only discussed corrosion control as a cosmetic solution to address the discoloration in the water. This was during the time when Flint officials were testing Walters' home tap, eventually finding over seven times the EPA's action level for lead.

Among the three officials named in Walter's lawsuit, only one remains in office: Eden Wells, Michigan's chief medical executive in charge of the Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Wells admitted to *NBC News* in January that internal warnings from an MDHHS epidemiologist about increased lead levels in children during the summer of 2014 was “a missed opportunity.” A full year before Flint pediatrician Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha held a press conference to make the public aware of the spike in the blood lead levels of Flint children, state health authorities knew and higher-

ups in the agencies covered it up.

Brad Wurfel, resigned communications director and public spokesman for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), personally intervened by publicly slandering EPA lead specialist Manuel Del Toral as a “rogue employee.” Wurfel, the public voice of the state agency tasked with protecting water quality, also publicly discredited the extensive lead-in-water testing done in Flint by Virginia Tech University in August-September of 2015, saying the scientific testing is “pulling a rabbit out of a hat,” and accusing the team, led by Dr. Marc Edwards, of “fanning political flames irresponsibly.”

Finally, the head of the city of Flint’s Public Utilities Department, which oversees the city’s water system, including the archaic Flint Water Treatment Plant, Howard Croft, resigned from office shortly after newly elected mayor Karen Weaver took office last November. The change of regime in the city was a direct result of the outrage by the population over the poisoning of the water. Croft was at the center of the deal making around the switch from Detroit water.

Weeks after he left office, during the holiday season, Croft’s office was burgled and files relating to the city water system went missing. The culprit has yet to be discovered, and the press has been silent for weeks.

Walters played a critical role in bringing the lead poisoning of Flint’s water to public attention. When she was told by officials that her household lead-in-water problem was specific to just her home, she responded by seeking outside help. It was Walters who contacted Dr. Edwards at Virginia Tech and organized the intensive sampling that uncovered the massive lead contamination of residents’ water. It was early in September, as a result, when the public was first warned.



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