

Second test of Flint water being performed by Virginia Tech

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The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held an event in Flint, Michigan last Saturday, March 12, which it billed as an “EPA Open House” for the city’s residents. The event coincided with the collection of new water samples by a Virginia Tech university team from the same homes that were tested for lead levels last August. The purpose of the direct comparison is to see if there is any change in the lead content of Flint’s water since the city switched back to Lake Huron water delivered and treated by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD).

The EPA has been working with the VT team in the latest sampling project in an effort to restore public trust in the discredited federal agency, which was complicit in the cover up of the poisoning of city residents. The EPA spared no expense to make its presence prominent at the event. Top officials from EPA’s Region 5 (Northern Midwest) were there. Booths were set up to explain the proper technique of water filter installation, recycling of plastic bottles, including charts and maps of previous water samplings and general information on lead poisoning.

The residents who attended, however, largely kept a suspicious distance from the plethora of smiling EPA employees and officials. Because of his role in bringing the lead crisis to light, Dr. Marc Edwards, who made himself available to talk with residents, was welcomed.

The event was held on the eve of the Congressional oversight committee hearings on Flint in Washington, DC. Local and national politicians were present in Flint, including Jason Chaffetz, the Utah Congressman chairing Washington hearings and Tim Walberg, a congressman from south-central Michigan.

Five months after Governor Rick Snyder finally made funds available and ordered the city to switch its water supply from the Flint River back to Detroit’s system,

the drinking water in Flint is still poisoned with lead. This is due to the fact that the river water, which was corrosive and untreated, did so much damage to the city’s antiquated lead pipes that they continue to leach lead, copper and other neurotoxins even with a clean water supply.

Lead in Flint’s water wasn’t the first issue. Shortly after the April 2014 switch, residents complained of foul smelling, foul tasting and discolored water. E. coli bacteria emerged in the drinking water, leading to several “boil water” alerts in the summer of 2014. Then after over-treating the water with chlorine, trihalomethanes, a carcinogenic byproduct of this treatment, appeared, leading to the issuing of additional health warnings. Through all of this, city and state officials repeated that the water was safe to drink and complied with federal safe drinking water regulations.

Water being pumped into all the homes in the city from the Flint River was eating away at the service lines and plumbing for almost a year before it first was tested in the home of LeeAnne Walters, a Flint mother whose youngest child was diagnosed with lead poisoning. The initial sampling results by a City of Flint water department official showed lead levels seven times higher than the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action level.

Subsequently, EPA Region 5 Regulations Manager Miguel Del Toral visited Walters’ home to confirm the findings of the testing. When he asked officials what measures were being taken by the city to prevent corrosion, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) officials told Del Toral that a corrosion control program was in place as required by EPA regulations.

Later, Walters discovered from Flint water department employees that no corrosion control was in

place. She informed Del Toral who produced a June memorandum to water officials warning of the threat to children from high lead levels in the water. He also said incorrect water sampling methods had obscured the real lead content in the water and, most importantly, that the city lacked any corrosion control system.

His superiors at the EPA, however, quashed Del Toral's report. Now-resigned Region 5 EPA administrator Susan Hedman infamously said she wished the report had never been written and that it would tell a different story after she had "edited and vetted it."

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed Del Toral on the Flint events.

It wasn't until a research team from Virginia Tech University led by Dr. Marc Edwards, the foremost lead-in-water expert in the US, conducted extensive independent sampling in late summer 2015 that residents were publicly warned of the lead crisis and instructed not to drink the water.

Stephanie Webber, a Flint resident, volunteered in the collection of samples from residents. "As we go, we ship them through UPS," she told the WSWS. Stephanie explained how she has been affected by the water crisis. "In August 2015 I got pneumonia caused by Legionnaires. I was a healthy 20-year-old until then. They couldn't figure out what was going on. The news hadn't figured out it was the Legionella bacteria, so I didn't find out until December."

She added, "Our other house had mold. Now, I'm very scared to use the water—afraid to wash my hands in it. I have cuts on my fingers and I'm terrified. They're killing my father and my sister. My dad had an eye stroke caused by high blood pressure from drinking the water. My sister had a bone scan that showed lead lines."

The WSWS taped residents and concerned supporters about the conditions in Flint. That video will appear tomorrow.



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