

Michigan governor ends state water distribution in Flint

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Hundreds of cars lined up at the four remaining water distribution centers in Flint, Michigan after Governor Rick Snyder announced last Friday that the state would cease distributing bottled water by Friday, April 13 or even sooner if remaining supplies run out.

To justify this latest provocation against the residents who have suffered from years of lead-poisoned water, Snyder said the latest tests by state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) show lead in water at the rate of 4 parts per billion (ppb), which is less than the 15 ppb considered an “action level” by the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Lead and Copper Rule. Scientists have said no amount of lead in water is safe.

The DEQ, moreover, is the same agency that lied to the public, saying the water was safe to drink for more than a year even as residents complained and protested about foul-smelling and discolored water coming out of their taps. In effect, the Snyder administration is now saying to residents: “We don’t care if you trust your water or trust us. It’s time to pay up!”

In a vote of no confidence, those residents who were able took their cars and lined up for the last remaining water bottles. Some of the backups at the distribution centers were almost a mile long. A YouTube video showed the vehicle line ups.

“It’s a form of terrorism that they are carrying out,” longtime Flint resident Gladys Williamson told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “They need to put someone in jail. They are terrorizing people with fear. People are waiting one, two or three hours just to get water.”

Kory Saim, a former Ford worker, told the WSWS, “The decision by the state is disheartening, especially since we have been going through this for so long. I really think it’s a debacle, especially after people voted against giving Nestle the water and they go ahead and

do it anyway.

“I don’t believe anything is resolved [regarding the water’s toxicity]. They have fixed some things, but it is not complete by any means. People should have clean water.

“I’m in the same boat as everyone else. They came and replaced my pipes from the front yard to the house; however, they never touched the pipes in the street before it comes to the house.

“Altogether I’m severely disappointed. It’s the worst thing I have lived through in Flint other than the plant closing.”

Phyllis told our reporter, “I’m here to pick up water for my 93-year-old mother. I don’t know of anyone who has any confidence in the water and plans to use it. My feeling is the governor should take responsibility for his actions and for what he allowed his people to do to Flint.”

Larry Ross said, “This is borderline ridiculous. First, how could they claim they resolved the problem with the water in the city? At most maybe one-third of the city has had its pipes changed. That’s at most!

“It makes you feel that there never was a plan to replace the pipes. They are blowing smoke. And now they are saying the water is safe? I thought they had to build up the water in the system by flushing it through for the water to be safe. How could they do that when the pipes haven’t been replaced? I have no idea of how they did the screening to determine who gets the pipes changed. In the end, it’s all about the money. They don’t want to spend the money.

“I’m afraid that people have started drinking the water and will get sick. The problem is we will never know the extent of the damage for two or three years. I can tell you if they stop distributing the water I’m not going to drink it. I’ll buy it at the store for me and my

kids. I'm never going to drink this water."

Lynn was extremely upset with the decision to stop the water distribution. "I'm opposed to it. They tested the water in the schools and found out they had a problem. They haven't finished all the pipes and some people don't have a car to drive down to the PODS [distribution points] and get water. What are they supposed to do?"

"I know quite a few people who have not had their pipes replaced. Even those who have don't trust the water. A friend of mine lost his wife last month and they found out recently she had Legionnaires disease from the water. This happened a month ago, which means this is still an issue we are dealing with. She was only 35 years old and had children.

"It's just devastating. Heartbreaking"

From the beginning, Flint's working-class residents have had to fight for everything in the face of the criminal indifference and cover-up by government officials. They only proved their water was poisoned and a public health crisis existed in the city by soliciting the support of scientists, including a Virginia Tech team led by Professor Marc Edwards and local pediatrician Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha. The doctor revealed that lead levels in the blood of the city's children blood had doubled since the city's water supply was switched to the Flint River.

Initially the Snyder administration vilified these findings. Finally on October 8, 2015—nearly 18 months after the switchover to the Flint River—Snyder announced funds would be made available for Flint to switch back to its original water source. By then, Flint's water pipe infrastructure was decimated as a result of the decisions made by the state, first to switch to the highly acidic Flint River water, secondly to do this illegally without the use of corrosion control. So, it was unknown how long it would take for lead levels to improve and the pipe system to stabilize.

Initially, as a result of widespread news coverage, charitable donations of bottled water were trucked up to Flint by sympathetic forces, mainly workers who wanted to do something to help. The distribution of free bottled water by the state did not start until January 2016, after Snyder finally declared a state of emergency.

Then-newly-elected Democratic Mayor Karen Weaver launched a "Fast Start" lead pipe replacement

project in February 2016. The program's stated goal was to replace all the city's lead and galvanized service lines by 2020. To date, only about one-third of the program's goal of replacing 20,000 pipes has been completed. Even with the completion of the project, many residents say they will never trust the water.

Lifelong resident Florlisa Fowler also spoke with the WSWs. "I have a 79-year-old neighbor who asked me to come over because she was interviewed by the media. The state hasn't fixed a thing in her house. It's not just the line to the house. They haven't done anything.

"It is horrible what they are doing to people. What's really bad is that this is affecting children and the elderly. People will get sick if they use the water."

At the same time the state is cutting off the water distribution, the city is beginning water shutoffs for nonpayment of bills. Many residents refuse to pay for the water, which they cannot drink. The cutoff of water distribution along with the water shutoffs of residents in arrears are calculated to force residents to pay the exorbitant water bills. Both Democrats and Republicans advocate this savage campaign, which will ostensibly allow the city to retain its "independence" from an emergency financial manager by reestablishing its revenue stream from water bill payments.

"My concern is the water," Gladys said. The pipe replacement, she continued, "is not scheduled to be completed until 2020. If that is the case, the state should provide water until the pipes are replaced.

"I went by the line for water and it must have been at least three-quarters of a mile long. It's just unbelievable! One guy's car overheated. There are so many things building up that there is going to be an explosion."



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