

State of emergency declared in Metro Detroit following failure of huge water transmission main

Kevin Reed
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On Sunday morning, the governor of Michigan declared a state of emergency for four counties north of Detroit following a water main break on Saturday near the Great Lakes Water Authority's (GLWA) Lake Huron water treatment facility.

A tweet from the governor in the early afternoon said: "I've declared a state of emergency for Lapeer, Macomb, Oakland, and St. Clair counties following yesterday's water main break resulting in a Boil Water Advisory."

Whitmer's tweet also said: "We're drawing on every resource we have and taking every action necessary to get impacted families the help they need." A press release from the governor's office said the state of emergency "authorizes the Michigan State Police, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division (MSP/EMHSD) to coordinate and maximize state efforts to assist."

As of this writing, the GLWA reported that at least "some of the waterflow/pressure" had been restored to all areas, but the crisis was still severe enough to maintain the boil water advisory for seven communities, or 130,000 people stretching from Burtchville Township along Lake Huron, about 60 miles northeast of Detroit, down to Rochester Township in the suburbs of the Motor City.

The water authority said that it was able to restore pressure by rerouting the direction that water is pumped in the transmission system. Meanwhile, maintenance crews have isolated the break and started pumping water out of the area to prepare the segment of the system to be replaced. The new pipe is on a truck from Texas to Michigan, the GLWA said, and a complete restoration of service is expected to take up to two

weeks, "one week for the repairs and an additional week for water quality testing."

The water main failure was first reported by GLWA early Saturday. The regional water authority said it had "discovered a leak on a 120-inch water transmission main that distributes finished drinking water from its Lake Huron Water Treatment Facility to communities in the northern part of GLWA's drinking water service area."

The GLWA report said the leak was located in the vicinity of Burtchville Township, approximately one mile west of the treatment facility. Due to the drop in water pressure, GLWA initially issued a "precautionary Boil Water Advisory" on Saturday for 23 communities and impacting 935,000 people.

This wider area included the city and township of Flint, already a watchword across the world for the lead-in-water crisis that devastated the population in 2015, as well as the cities of Pontiac, Auburn Hills, Troy and Rochester Hills in heavily populated Oakland County, and Sterling Heights, Utica and Clinton Township in Macomb County, home to many auto plants and auto workers, including the largest Stellantis assembly plant, Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP).

Under the advisory, residents have been instructed not to drink the water without boiling it first. The GLWA guidelines specified: "Residents must bring all water to a boil for at least one minute and then let it cool before using. Boiled, bottled or disinfected water should be used for drinking, making ice, washing dishes, brushing teeth, and preparing food until further notice."

The water authority explained that whenever a water system loses pressure for a significant period, there is a

likelihood that bacterial contamination will occur. “Bacteria are generally not harmful and are common throughout our environment. Boiling water before using it will kill bacteria and other organisms that may be in the water,” the GLWA statement said.

The failure of a water transmission main that is 10 feet in diameter and feeds treated water to more than 25 percent of the population in the Detroit Metropolitan area is the latest expression of the catastrophic condition of America’s infrastructure. The decay of society is manifest in the fact the state of Michigan, which has the longest freshwater shoreline and access to the largest supply of freshwater anywhere in the world, including four of the five Great Lakes, has experienced another failure of the water system.

The ruling class is concerned about growing public anger regarding the failure of the government to maintain and guarantee a basic necessity such as water. One local news report said the GLWA phone system was overwhelmed with hundreds of angry customers calling to complain when they discovered they had no water on Saturday morning.

Like many major metropolitan regions across the country, Southeast Michigan—once the worldwide center of engineering and manufacturing and the location of the highest standard of living for the working class—has been transformed over the past 60 years into a symbol of American capitalist decline.

For decades, industries have been gutted, essential services have been starved of resources, the population of the city of Detroit has been impoverished, while the top echelons of the corporate and financial elite have enriched themselves.

The GLWA, which was created in 2014 following the bankruptcy of Detroit, was also responsible for the widespread flooding in the metro area in June 2021, when the storm drain system failed to handle the heavy rains and 100,000 homes in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties went under water.

According to a report published in 2019 by the GLWA, the agency has three intake locations for its service area: one in Lake Huron, where the failure occurred, and two in the Detroit River, one at Belle Isle and the other at Fighting Island near Wyandotte, that include 23 miles of raw water tunnels ranging from 120 to 186 inches in diameter.

The study says that the largest portion of the

transmission system, 214 miles, was installed in the 1960s. Meanwhile, 414 miles was installed before 1960, including 200 miles of the infrastructure, which was installed between 1900 and 1930. There are 132 miles of the Detroit-area water transmission system that are between 90 and 100 years old.



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