

# Jackson, Mississippi, water outage continues for fourth day

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Since the cresting of the Pearl River four days prior, the more than 180,000 residents of Jackson, Mississippi, continued to be without access to clean drinking water Thursday.

After Jackson's main water treatment facility had failed to operate Monday, the National Guard was deployed to assist in the distribution of bottled water as maintenance crews work round the clock to get the system back online.

President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration late Tuesday night over the water crisis in the city, supplementing what the state cannot, or, more accurately, will not spare. Federal aid is sure to be limited and many residents can expect to receive nothing at all.

Over the last 25 years, inadequate funding at the state and local levels has been thrown into stopgap improvements and repairs to the water and sewage system. This leaves unresolved the myriad issues which allowed for critical public infrastructure in the state's capital to collapse amid significant flooding.

The distribution of water has proven poorly coordinated. On Tuesday, thousands of residents, young and old, stood in a line measuring more than a mile long at Hawkins Field Airport to receive water. Expected to last more than three hours, water resources, totaling 700 cases of bottled water, were depleted in less than two.

"I keep saying we're going to be the next Michigan," Jeraldine Watts, 86, told CNN, continuing, "And it looks like that's exactly what we're headed for." Watts was referring to the well-known water crisis affecting thousands of poor and working-class residents in Flint, Michigan.

Beginning in April 2014, Flint residents, including more than 30,000 schoolchildren, were subjected to

lead-poisoning, which carries with it myriad ailments, including brain injuries. This came after Flint was removed from its five-decade treated source of water via Lake Huron, provided by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, to drawing improperly treated water from the polluted Flint River.

Like Flint at the time, déjà vu is setting in Jackson; a Democratic Mayor and Republican Governor are in charge.

Jackson Democratic Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba reassured CNN's Pamela Brown that more water assistance is on its way. "I have been assured by MEMA [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency] that they will supplement those locations with about 28 tanker trucks distributed at various points across the city," he said.

Meanwhile, people who were not lucky enough to be the first 700 in line Tuesday were turned away without any water for their life necessities, from general consumption for hydration to hygiene and medical needs.

Mississippi Republican Governor Tate Reeves said the state is "surging our resources to the city's water treatment facility and beginning emergency maintenance, repairs and improvements," continuing, "We will do everything in our power to restore water pressure and get water flowing back to the people of Jackson." In other words, Reeves, his Republican colleagues, and his Democratic cohorts will do virtually nothing to fix fundamental problems to prevent the next water crisis. According to Reeves, access to clean drinking water will remain under the auspices of the state and Federal governments "for an unknown period of time."

On Thursday, Lumumba issued a statement claiming, "We made some positive gains within the system. We

are encouraged,” following officials declaring some areas of the city’s water pressure is “almost normal pressure.” On Wednesday, water pressure was reported to have increased to 78 pounds per square inch (psi) with a goal to reach 87 psi, up from 40 earlier this week. Also on Wednesday, a rental pump was installed at Jackson’s water treatment facility in hopes to pump an additional 4 million gallons of water a day into the system. According to Lumumba, it remains unknown when residents will no longer have to boil water, which cannot be properly assessed until water pressure returns to normal.

Measuring pH is among the myriad challenges crews are facing with the city’s water system. The pH scale is commonly used to represent hydrogen ion activity where pH values below 7 (neutral) represent acidic solutions and those above representing basic solutions. If the imbalances are too great on either side of the pH scale, the water will be undrinkable.

According to Reeves, “There have been some challenges with the sensors that are measuring the pH balance of the water coming into the facility.” Reeves went on to say that operators at the O.B. Curtis Water Treatment Plant have worked with and “seen every pH level and they know exactly what they need to add” to normalize imbalances, adding, “We think there is a potential for a relatively quick fix on that to get those sensors accurate.”

Officials are not confident the stopgap will work, but state and local officials were insistent on moving forward with it, according to Reeves, but not without admitting its potential failure, “There will be future interruptions ... they are not avoidable at this point,” he said during a Wednesday news conference.

All the while residents are seeing cloudy, discolored water coming from their taps. Following reports of the dirty water, residents are being told on the one hand that it should be adequate for sanitation purposes, and on the other that it should not be consumed, used to cook, nor wash dishes.

Senior Deputy and Director of Health Protection at the Mississippi Department of Health Jim Craig warned residents, “Please make sure in the shower that your mouth is not open,” adding that pets should also not consume any of the water.

In a sign of “good faith”—in others words, to shift blame from the role himself, Reeves, and every level of

government has played in allowing Jackson’s water and wastewater treatment facilities to fail—Lumumba announced on Monday that the city’s Public Works Director Marlin King, who oversaw water and wastewater treatment facilities, has been reassigned as the city’s Planning and Development Director. King will be replaced with Melissa Payne, the mayor’s spokesperson. Despite Lumumba’s statement that the water shortage is to last “the next couple of days,” the end to the immediate crisis is highly uncertain.

Jackson is but one of many cities that have recently experienced the contamination and failure of water systems:

- In late July, auto parts provider Tribar Technologies dumped cancer-causing chemicals into the Huron River, which flows through the sewage system of Wixom, Michigan.

- Just two weeks later a water main break on the day prior near the Great Lakes Water Authority’s Lake Huron water treatment plant prompted Michigan’s Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer to declare a state of emergency for four counties north of Detroit.

- A major water main break occurred in Odessa, Texas in June, rendering more than 165,000 without water for more than 48 hours as temperatures reached into the high 90s Fahrenheit.



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