

# Boil water advisory lifted in Baltimore after *E. coli* detected in water supply

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On Friday, the Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW) lifted a boil water advisory for residents throughout the Baltimore, Maryland, region and beyond after a sampling earlier in the week had detected *E. coli* in the water. Throughout the week, nearly 100,000 residents had been receiving bottled water due to the contamination.

Baltimore's Democratic Mayor Brandon Scott released a statement telling residents there was "no further evidence of contamination" and assured residents that "the water is now safe to use throughout the small advisory area and the initial impact zone."

On Monday, residents of a few select areas were informed that they "may want to consider boiling any water used from faucets." On Tuesday, the DPW sent out a boil water notice for 54 square blocks of the city, encompassing 1,500 residential and commercial buildings.

Following this, DPW also issued a precautionary boil water advisory for a much larger area including much of West Baltimore and parts of neighboring Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties.

Despite professions that the water was now safe, city officials continued to distribute water throughout the region. "We would like all residents to flush their system by turning their faucets on cold, their showers and all other items that you use for water, start at the lower end of the home, go up to the higher end and flush the entire system," stated Director of Public Works Jason Mitchell.

Starting on September 6, officials in Baltimore City and Baltimore County began distributing water bottles to residents in the affected neighborhoods in the city at a local elementary school, but the distribution was limited to three gallons per household each day, and many residents reported that the distribution site had

run out well before everyone was able to get water. Some spoke to local news explaining that they were unable to get water since both the city and local stores had completely run out.

Mayor Scott's promises of "safe water" came after a week of confusion and panic among city residents. Initially, Scott waited until 3 p.m. on Monday to issue a vague statement saying that the *E. coli* contamination was "limited to a specific area" after city council members had already spoken to the public.

Residents had denounced the administration for not providing water directly to those who could not travel to the distribution centers, like nursing home residents and the disabled. In addition, the city quickly came under fire for the lack of communication with residents. Many affected by the advisory had to be notified by neighbors or friends, not having seen the tweets or official announcement on the DPW website.

Adding to the confusion, DPW released a revised map removing the portion of Anne Arundel County after county officials explained that "Anne Arundel does not currently purchase any water from the City of Baltimore."

It also emerged that the initial positive *E. coli* samples had been taken and processed the previous Friday, September 2. This prompted outrage from residents who had been drinking potentially tainted water through the entire Labor Day holiday weekend.

A DPW official told Fox News Baltimore the delay was done to protect the reputation of the agency. "Media relations people should only be responsible for putting out clear facts to the public for their consumption and not spinning something to make it look a little better or a little worse," the official stated.

In the same Twitter thread with the *E. coli* notice, the DPW stated that it "is flushing the system continuously

and performing leak detection, valve assessments and increasing the chlorination in the area” to deal with the contamination.

The affected area is predominantly working class and poor, with the median annual household income of the residents in the area under the original advisory being \$26,000, according to the US Census Bureau.

This is not the first incident of bacterial contamination in the city’s water infrastructure. In April, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) issued a health advisory for the Back River, which is located two miles east of Baltimore city, due to high bacteria levels.

The failing Back River Waste Water Treatment Plant, one of the three water treatment plants in the city, is responsible for handling the sewage that enters the river.

In March, oversight of the plant was transferred from the city to the state to avoid “catastrophic failure” that could jeopardize public health, according to MDE Secretary Ben Grumbles.

The water crisis in Baltimore comes amidst the collapse of the water and sewage system in Jackson, Mississippi, which occurred late last month due to heavy flooding. Over 150,000 Jackson residents still do not have access to clean drinking water and have had to wait in long lines to receive bottled water from state officials.

There is no limit to the resources the ruling elite will pour into their own pockets or the escalation of war with Russia and China, but funding for infrastructure, along with other essential social services, are cut to the bone because “there is no money.”

Baltimore’s water system presently serves 1.8 million people, or over one-third of the state of Maryland. Like many cities across the US, Baltimore has aging infrastructure dating back to the nineteenth century, some as far back as the Civil War.

“[These issues] are sort of out of sight out of mind,” said former Department of Public Works director Rudolph Chow to WBALT in 2017. “These are buried assets underground, water pipes as well as sewer pipes that’s been there for decades and some of them are certainly reaching 100-plus years old.”

“Keeping the system afloat requires constant repair amid a 6-year, \$2 billion overhaul. The cost mostly shouldered by ratepayers, as critical funding from the

feds dries up,” added the local station.

Earlier this summer, the Baltimore City Board of Estimates voted unanimously to increase water rates by 3.2 percent per year for the next three years. This follows a 9.3 percent increase last year. The city is forcing its working population to pay for whatever meager improvements are made to the system.

For over a decade now the American Society of Civil Engineers has rated US infrastructure at a “D+”. Incidents like those in Jackson and in Baltimore will only become more frequent as long as society remain subordinated to the capitalist profit motive.



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