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What Flint's Murky Waters Mean to You

Posted By *Carson Quinn* On January 15, 2016 @ 5:18 AM In Health | [Comments Disabled](#)

"This should serve as a wake-up call to the entire nation." Chloe Demrovsky of the Disaster Recovery Institute is talking about the escalating water woes in Flint, Michigan.

"If we don't invest in updating our systems, some of the fundamental rights that we take for granted today, like access to clean water and electricity, could soon be a thing of the past," Demrovsky told LifeZette.

They say it all the time: "Something's in the water." This time, in Flint, that something is lead. Residents' tap water has been proven now to contain elevated levels of lead. The city changed the water supply back in 2014, from Lake Huron, to a local river. The state of Michigan, however, applied the wrong standards for governing drinking water.

The move resulted in a system that didn't control corrosion in the pipes. Lead from the pipes as well as other pathogens have now leached into the town's water supply and the entire area is now in a state of emergency.

In addition, the top Midwest official of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reportedly knew about the crisis months before it became public. And just this week, Governor Rick Snyder, during a press conference, announced 10 deaths in an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. Nearly 90 more may be sick from the dangerous infection that spreads through tainted water sources.

Flint's change in its water supply, many fear, was a bungled attempt at cost-cutting.

"The whole thing is ridiculous. I know it was to save money, but people need clean water," Cordaro Alvarado, a barista at Flint-based Cafe Rhema, told LifeZette. The cafe serves upwards of 500 cups of coffee and other water-based drinks per day. They've been in business for two-and-a-half years, and they're located right outside the University of Michigan-Flint campus where students stream in for coffee throughout the day.

"Everyone kept saying 'don't drink the water.' But it's a basic human need," Cordaro said.

We depend on water to live. When things go wrong with what's coming out of the tap, it's unsettling.

Alvarado said Cafe Rhema is one of the few places in Flint that has a reverse osmosis filter

that removes 94 to 98 percent of the lead and other impurities. That's why the water hasn't affected business, Alvarado said.

"We implemented it once the lead problem started, but we wanted to go the extra mile for our customers to make sure the water is completely safe," said Alvarado. "Sometimes they'll start to buy a bottle of water and we have to tell them that our water is purified. Most of the time they're shocked."

That's a luxury not everyone can afford: Reverse osmosis filters can get expensive, especially when churning out gallons of purified water for a small business.

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Communities throughout the nation right now are looking at replacing aging infrastructure. Without going through the incredibly expensive and expansive process of replacing underground water delivery systems, many others could find themselves in the same shoes as Flint.

"Make it a priority to test the water," Demrovsky of the Disaster Recovery Institute said. "If you have small children or are pregnant, get tested for dangerous lead levels and seek treatment as soon as possible."

Lead filters and other water treatments can be found at local tool and home improvement stores. You should also stop drinking water from the tap and start drinking water from a closed bottle, but that's obviously not a long-term solution. The CDC also recommends avoiding uncleaned hot tubs, decorative fountains and air conditioner cooling towers, all places where bacteria is able to grow.

But the EPA sets standards and regulations for the presence and amount of over 90 different contaminants in public drinking water, including E. coli, salmonella, and cryptosporidium species. If you notice a change in smell, taste, or appearance of your water, call your public water system company, the CDC says.

Getting educated about the issues, asking questions of your local city officials and staying current with any water related announcements in your area are critical.

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"What is done cannot be undone," Dr. Marc Edwards, a professor at Virginia Tech who leads a group of scientists who are volunteering to help resolve the issue in Flint, said of the issue there. "However, the damage can be mitigated with good nutrition." His colleagues developed a dietary plan_ [3]for those who may have been affected by the lead poisoning. The

plan includes incorporating foods with higher levels of calcium, iron and Vitamin C.

"Lead in water is a significant problem in many U.S. cities, but as far as I know, other cities and towns are offered at least the minimum protection of federal law," said Edwards.

A class-action lawsuit has been filed against Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality. It alleges the state wasn't treating Flint's water with an anti-corrosive agent, which would be a violation of federal law.

While the finger pointing rages on in Flint and authorities search for a solution, the Michigan National Guard has been mobilized to assist with distributing water supplies in Flint. The state has also requested help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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