

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Water alert a lesson in ways things can go wrong

Don't drink water from a hose. Pasadena Park Water District 17 did essentially that last month and ended up triggering a mandatory boil order that could be a case history in how everything that can go wrong will.

Because the owners of a home where district workers normally take a water sample were gone, they sampled a tap outside the house, where it could easily be contaminated by dirt or other material. The lab analyzing the water found *E. coli*, a bacterium that can cause diarrhea, nausea and other symptoms.

When *E. coli* are found, the Washington Department of Health requires a retest at the first site, points upstream and downstream, and at the well where the water was obtained. No *E. coli* was found, but there was other coliform bacteria that should not be present in a water system, but would not by itself trigger

But because of the initial *E. coli* finding, the state requires a Tier 1 alert to water system customers directing them to boil water.

The lab confirmed the water was tainted at about 4:40 p.m. on Friday, March 21. At that point, the district can take any one of four actions to notify its customers: alert the media; post conspicuous notices like sandwich signs around the district; post notices on every customer's door; or reach out through some other means approved by the state.

The state takes the lead in contacting the media. Do that after 5 p.m. on any day, and you miss the early evening news cycle. By the time the 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. cycles come around, many of the customers are in bed. Do that on a Friday, and many will be out, perhaps for the weekend. It could get worse. And did.

The Department of Health uses email to alert media of a news event. That day, the email system was down. Agency officials had to call each newsroom individually to get the word out.

So, the district complied with regulations, but many customers did not get the word in a timely way. Some were hot, and let the district, state and media know so.

The district recovered by doing what should have been done in the first place: using a reverse 911 call system that notified customers the water was again usable. However, with so many relying exclusively on cell phones, if they have not registered the phone with the 911 system, they will not get a call.

The City of Spokane uses reverse 911, Twitter and Facebook. It also notifies anyone who subscribes to the city's several websites. In a significant emergency, the mayor can be summoned to add urgency to an alarm.

Neither the city nor Pasadena district have had to issue a Tier 1 alert for many years. Statewide, there might be as many as 100 in a year.

To help small districts like Pasadena, with just 2,300 customers, the Department of Health intends to meet with all districts that tap the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer users to encourage cooperation and support during future alerts. Good idea. Although the health threat last month turned out to be minimal, that may not always be the case.

Any effort to protect the aquifer is a plus. How it's treated above and below ground matters if we want to keep it drinkable — from a glass.

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THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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Pasadena Park Irrigation District BWA Q&A

Updated on 3/27

What happened:

- Because some routine samples showed a potential problem with the water system, we told the system operator that repeat samples should be tested.
- When the repeat samples confirmed that there really might be a problem, we told the water system to issue a boil-water advisory.
- Our process is very conservative and protective. The water system samples the water regularly, and if the samples indicate a potential problem, we issue a BWA as a precautionary measure.

Why didn't I hear about the BWA sooner?

- The repeat sample tests were not ready until late Friday afternoon.
- Schools were notified immediately on Friday late afternoon, and water system personnel started door-to-door notification, which continued into Saturday afternoon.
- For a system this size with more than 2,300 connections and a small staff, it's challenging to contact everyone directly. That's why we issued a news release Friday night as a supplement.
- By mid-day Saturday, the media had been reporting the advisory since Friday night. For a system this size, we issue news releases as an extra means of getting word out about the advisory.

Did the water system adequately meet its responsibility to notify all customers?

- Our staff was in touch with the water system throughout the weekend. We're aware they made a strong effort to get everyone notified. Our office worked with the news media over the weekend so that blanketed coverage would occur as well. For a system this size it's difficult to get the word out to everyone. Water system personnel continued to notify customers throughout the week. We believe that the water system's effort and our work with the media resulted in the word getting out to the vast majority of customers within 24 hours.

What was the problem and what was done to fix it?

- The Department of Health inspected the system to identify the cause of the bad samples. Sometimes in these situations there isn't always a clear explanation for bad sample results, and sometimes it can be a combination of things, including a problem with the sampling location, or a problem with the disinfection system. Both of these problems may have contributed to the problem here at Pasadena Park last week.
- Water system personnel chlorinated and flushed the system at the end of last week, and they have taken steps to ensure that the system is adequately disinfected at all times. They revised their sampling procedures to ensure all samples in the future are representative of the water in the system.

How do we know the water is safe to drink now?

- Water system personnel collected and tested a series of water quality samples at the source and throughout the system to evaluate the safety of the water. The final test results were available Thursday morning.
- Because all the test results showed that the water is safe to drink, the advisory was lifted.

Should I be worried about my family's health?

- If you are not experiencing any symptoms, there's no need to worry.
- If you have symptoms, talk to your health care provider, and mention the boil water advisory.

Could anything have been done differently/better?

- With any event like this, we will debrief with all involved parties to see if anything could have been done differently and find potential improvements.

*****ECRWSEDDM*****

Postal Customer
Spokane, WA 99217

PRSR STD
ECRWWS
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
EDDM RETAIL

PASADENA PARK IRRIGATION DISTRICT 17
9227 E Upriver Drive
Spokane, WA 99206
509.926.5535

YOUR WATER IS SAFE

This notice is to advise you that the 'Boil Your Water Notice' was lifted on Thursday, March 27th, 2014.

Pursuant to State and Federal Regulations, Pasadena Park Irrigation District No. 17 is required to regularly collect and test water samples throughout the water system. Test results are reported to the Washington State Department of Health. On the afternoon of Friday, March 21, there was confirmation that one of the tests showed E.coli. There was also evidence that the chlorination system was not operating properly. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health enforced a "Boil Order" on Friday at 4:45pm, March 21st, 2014.

The Department of Health inspected the system to identify the cause of the bad samples. Sometimes in these situations there isn't always a clear explanation for bad sample results, and sometimes it can be a combination of things, including a problem with the sampling location, or a problem with the disinfection system. Both of these problems may have contributed to the problem here at Pasadena Park last week.

We chlorinated and flushed the system at the end of last week, and we have taken steps to ensure that the system is adequately disinfected at all times. We revised our sampling procedures to ensure all samples in the future are representative of the water in the system. We collected and tested a series of water quality samples at the source and throughout the system to evaluate the safety of the water. The final test results were available on Thursday, March 27. **We are proud to inform you that none of the tests showed any trace of E.coli, and all tests also show that the chlorination system is now running properly.** Because all the test results showed that the water is safe to drink, the advisory was lifted.

Pasadena Park Irrigation District No. 17 wants to thank you for your patience and cooperation during this time.

Our #1 Goal has been and will always be to provide our customers with SAFE CLEAN WATER!

YOUR WATER IS SAFE!!!!

Bruce Davison

From: Mark Steward <marksteward_@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2014 5:15 PM
To: craig.riley@doh.wa.gov; clark.halverson@doh.wa.gov; Dorothy Tibbetts; ed.parry@doh.wa.gov; dswink@spokanecounty.org; sholderby@spokanecounty.org; carolyn.cox@doh.wa.gov; ppid17bruce@comcast.net; Rick Hartman; robert.james@doh.wa.gov; bob.james@doh.wa.gov
Subject: RE: Health Advisory for Pasadena Park Irrigation in Spokane Valley
Attachments: Pasadena Park Boil Water Advisory.doc

From: marksteward_@hotmail.com
To: craig.riley@doh.wa.gov; clark.halverson@doh.wa.gov; dorothea.tibbetts@doh.wa.gov; ed.parry@doh.wa.gov; dswink@spokanecounty.org; sholderby@spokanecounty.org; carolyn.cox@doh.wa.gov; ppid17bruce@comcast.net; hartman509@yahoo.com; robert.james@doh.wa.gov; bob.james@doh.wa.gov
Subject: Health Advisory for Pasadena Park Irrigation in Spokane Valley
Date: Fri, 21 Mar 2014 17:13:02 -0700

I'm unable to use my work email. Please see the health advisory summary below for Pasadena Park Irrigation in the Spokane Valley.

HEALTH ADVISORY SUMMARY

Today's Date: 3/21/2014

INCIDENT:

Confirmed

Acute Coliform Fecal / *E.coli*

Tier 1

REGIONAL OFFICE INCIDENT CONTACT	
Regional Office (RO):	Eastern
Name:	Mark Steward and Craig Riley
Day Phone(s):	Mark (509) 329-2134 Craig - (509) 329-2131
After-Hours:	Mark - (509) 270-6883 Craig - (509) 953-4682

WATER SYSTEM INFORMATION	
Name: PASADENA PARK IRR DIST 17	County: Spokane
ID: # 66300Y Group/Type: ACOMM	LHJ: Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD)
Number of connections:	Residential 2357 Non Residential 9
Population served:	Residential 6269 Non Residential ?
Location (proximity to nearest town):	The advisory affects more than 2,300 homes and businesses in an area just outside Spokane Valley. The district generally extends about 2 miles east and west of Argonne Road, and

	from the north bank of the Spokane River to about one mile south of Stoneman Road
Source information (number and type):	S02
Installed treatment:	Chlorinated
Operator/owner/title and phone number:	Bruce Davidson, Manager, (509) 926-5535
Who has been contacted (when)?	We've been working with the system since Thursday
System media contact & phone number:	Bruce Davidson, Manager, (509) 926-5535

SITUATION INFORMATION

Type of incident (Boil Water, Bottle Water, Etc.). Describe situation and suspected cause.	Boil Water Advisory. System had an initial unsatisfactory E.coli present sample collected from a location that the operators felt might be suspect. Today we have learned that the repeat samples are also unsatisfactory, E.coli absent. The chlorination system at the one operating well has been malfunctioning. Chlorine has been increased today and residuals are rising throughout the system.
Brief description of current water quality history:	Good history for coliform
Who Reported this incident:	Test America in Spokane Valley
Additional comments (media calls, illness reports, food service, school, medical facility, non-english customers, health risk, etc.):	Two schools and one elderly folks home. We have notified SRHD.
Customer PN delivered (how & when):	Will be hand delivered and media is being notified

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTION

Contact name & phone number:	Julie Aubrey, (509) 324-1570
Contacted (when & how)?	Called today and emailed

NEXT STEPS

Water system:	Issue advisory
Local health jurisdiction:	Advise those within the system that they regulate
RO/ODW:	Follow up with system over the weekend
Is ODW satisfied with response?	Yes.
Additional comments:	