

Patrick Denne Scholarship

The Flint, Michigan water crisis is an unfortunate, yet perfect example of the importance of the water industry. Flint, Michigan had been once been a prosperous town in the middle of the twentieth century. It was the birthplace of General Motors, and was home to nearly 200,000 people, but by 1980's several General Motors manufacturing plants shut down due to rising oil prices and auto imports (Denchak). Now, Flint population has been dwindled down to 100,000, and almost half of all residents live below the poverty line.

Due to a desperate need to save money in Flint's declining economy, Governor Rick Snyder appointed a group of unelected emergency managers to run the city. In April of 2014, to cut back on costs, Flint decided to switch the city's water supply from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to the Flint River until a water pipeline to Lake Huron was built (Denchak). Very soon after the switch, residents reported foul smelling, tasting, and looking water but were told by officials that the water was safe.

The Flint River was, in fact, not safe. For years it had been the home for waste disposal from local industries and received raw sewage from city's waste treatment plant. The water was also being treated improperly. When samples from various households were tested, 17% of samples came back with levels of lead higher than federal "action level" of 15 parts per billion (Denchak). The Flint River had become corrosive from years of misuse, and due to improper treatment, lead pipes that made up the city's water system were being corroded.

Other various harmful chemicals were also in the water, some which were meant to help treat it. Fecal coliform, a type of bacteria that indicates potential human and animal waste contamination (Denchak), is found in the water. Residents are then told to boil the water as a

means of purifying it. Boiling the water, however, increases the concentration of lead. Excess levels of TTHM, a carcinogen, are also found in the water due to excess chlorine being added. General Motors would later stop using water from the Flint River due to it being corrosive because of high levels of chloride. An outbreak Legionnaires' disease would kill 12 people sickened at least 87.

On January 12, 2015 Detroit offers to reconnect Flint to its water system, but Flint officials would decline the offer. On March 23, Flint City Council would vote to reconnect Flint to Detroit, but would be overruled by one of the city's emergency managers. It would not be until October 16 that the city of Flint would be reconnected to Detroit's water system, which would still not be safe to drink due to lead seepage. Bottled water would be distributed to residents as to avoid coming into contact with the water. It is not until April of 2018 that bottled water would stop being distributed, but residents still had concerns about their water quality. As of March 31, 2022 court proceedings are still happening as to the damages caused by officials dismissal of the case (Oliver).

Works Cited

Denchak, Melissa. "Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know." NRDC, 8 Nov. 2018, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know>.

Oliver, Joey. "Attorneys for Engineering Firm Question Former Flint Mayor Walling for Second Day." *Mlive*, 31 Mar. 2022, <https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2022/03/attorneys-for-engineering-firm-question-former-flint-mayor-walling-for-second-day.html>.