

Press Notice

Scottish Water Pleads Guilty to Supplying Water Unfit for Human Consumption in North Lanarkshire

Scottish Water has pleaded guilty to supplying water unfit for human consumption in a case heard today (6 June 2017) at Hamilton Sheriff Court. The water company was fined £3250 for the offence which occurred in June 2015, when water supplied to over 6,000 properties was contaminated with hydrocarbons, iron and manganese.

The Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR) investigated the incident and prepared the case for prosecution. The charges were brought under Section 76C of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980.

Sue Petch, Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland, said:

"This incident caused considerable inconvenience and worry to a large number of consumers in North Lanarkshire. People's confidence in the safety of the water supply was compromised, and our investigation found deficiencies with Scottish Water's operational processes. It was for this reason that we took the highly unusual step of reporting the case for prosecution.

We are fortunate in Scotland to have drinking water that is of extremely high quality, and incidents of this severity are very rare. Scottish Water have worked to improve procedures and I look to them to rebuild public trust in the area and ensure an incident of this nature never happens again, anywhere in Scotland."

Notes for Editors

- On 17 June 2015, consumers in 6085 properties in the Carfin area of North Lanarkshire received drinking water that contained high concentrations of hydrocarbons, iron and manganese. As a consequence, the water tasted, smelt and looked unacceptable to many of those intending to consume and use the water. Residents of the affected area were advised by Scottish Water on the evening of 17 June not to drink, cook or wash with the water, necessitating the closure of businesses and schools in the area – this restriction was lifted on the morning of 19 June. Investigation has revealed that the inadvertent shutdown of the water main supplying the area during a planned repair resulted in contaminated water from two sources on the Newhouse Industrial Estate being drawn back into the water supply system.
- Although some of the contamination arose from a third party industrial source, some was residual contamination left in a length of redundant water main that remained connected to the water network. Poorly controlled work by Scottish Water on a water main upstream of the two sources caused a drop in pressure and allowed the contamination to enter the main and reach consumers. Scottish Water has a duty to operate its distribution systems in a way which minimises the risk from backflow.
- The contaminated water contained mixture of hydrocarbon substances, including diesel, in low concentrations as well as iron and manganese. Following analysis of samples taken during the incident, health professionals have concluded that there was unlikely to have been a significant impact on the health of anyone consuming the water.
- Scottish Water has been prosecuted for the offence of supplying water unfit for human consumption under Section 76C of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980. DWQR investigates all water quality incidents reported by Scottish Water and acts in accordance with its [enforcement policy](#) .
- With the conclusion of legal proceedings, DWQR's assessment of the incident has been published on the [DWQR website](#).
- Scottish Water has reviewed and improved its processes for undertaking planned work on its distribution system since the incident. Drinking water quality in Scotland is generally excellent – of nearly 150,000 tests undertaken on samples taken from randomly selected consumers' taps across Scotland in 2016, 99.91% met the required regulatory standard.
- The role of Drinking Water Quality Regulator was created in 2002. The DWQR is independent of Scottish Ministers and ensures that the drinking water quality duties imposed on Scottish Water are complied with.