

## Blairlinnans South WSZ Contamination Event No. 5265 1 March 2013

DWQR Inspector:  
William Byers

### Summary of Incident

On 1<sup>st</sup> March, two separate contacts were received from consumers in the Clark Street area of Paisley reporting a fuel taste in their water supply. The NSO attending the calls was unable to discern a fuel taste but noted a chlorine taste. Measurement of the chlorine content showed this to be higher than normal and this was attributed to the temporary transfer of the area onto an adjacent supply system, which had a higher chlorine level, to enable the repair of a burst water main. The consumers were advised to run their taps for a time and the NSO carried out flushing of the water main in the street. A further contact was received in late afternoon on Sunday 3 March from a different property, again reporting a fuel taste, and samples were arranged to be taken the next day. The results of analysis showed there to be high levels of hydrocarbons in the samples with a maximum of 500µg/l being detected.

An operational incident team was established and a series of actions were put in place to investigate the source of contamination and to control any expansion of the affected area. It became evident through the investigations that contamination was localised and a 'Do not Use' notice was issued to affected consumers on 6 March. There is a mix of domestic, commercial and industrial premises in the area and Scottish Water's Industrial Byelaws teams were on site for the start of business the next day to commence inspections and investigations of the non-domestic premises for indications of backsiphonage of contaminants into the public water supply system. The inspections found one business where a number of Byelaws contraventions were found which provided a high risk of backsiphonage taking place. The water supplies into the premises were isolated until remedial works could be carried out and to allow the ongoing sampling and other investigations to verify there were no other possible contributors to the contamination.

Levels of hydrocarbons had fallen significantly in subsequent sampling providing confidence that the source of contamination had been found and isolated and discussions were held on 8 March with the Consultant in Public Health Medicine to remove the restrictions on use of the supply. However, due to failures of the standards in some microbiological samples, the restrictions were reduced to a Boil Notice. Disinfection of the water supply was boosted by use of a mobile chlorine dosing unit and following a series of sample results where no microbiological indicators of contamination were present, the decision was taken to remove all restrictions on water use on 10 March.

### DWQR Assessment of Cause of Incident

DWQR is satisfied that the likely cause of the incident was the backsiphonage of contaminant material into the public water supply system. The pipework arrangement between process equipment and the public water supply feeding the property was such that it could readily allow this type of event to occur.



## **DWQR Assessment of Actions Taken by Scottish Water**

Scottish Water took appropriate actions to investigate the cause of the contamination and to ensure the protection of consumers over the course of the incident. Investigations identified serious contraventions of the Water Supply Byelaws and DWQR considers the steps taken to isolate the source of contamination to have been essential to the resolution of the issue. Scottish Water has submitted a case for prosecution to the Procurator Fiscal and DWQR supports Scottish Water's intention to utilise their enforcement powers in relation to Byelaws contravention.

DWQR retains however, a concern that identification of the real issue behind the taste complaints could have been made earlier and remedial actions put in place quicker to protect consumers. Scottish Water recognises this issue and has commenced a review of procedures.

Scottish Water identified a number of actions from this incident. DWQR accepts that these are appropriate and will be monitoring to ensure they are completed prior to signing off the incident. Additionally, DWQR has made one recommendation.

