

Corsehouse RSZ
Pesticide Failure
August 2015

DWQR Inspector:
Moira Malcolm

Event No. 7104

Event Category: Significant

Summary of Incident

On 18th August 2015 a regulatory failure of the standard for pesticides, from a sample found to be containing MCPA was reported to Scottish Water's public health team (PHT). The sample was taken on 11th August. The failure was found in the Corsehouse supply zone, and a subsequent inspection of the catchment around Corsehouse reservoir found that a farmer had sprayed an area with Agritox which contains MCPA. The reservoir is the primary raw water source for Corsehouse WTW which supplies water to approximately 9000 consumers in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. There is no treatment process for pesticide removal at this works. The chemical has a half-life of 3 weeks in water, and further failing samples continued in supply until the source water blend of Corsehouse and White Loch was changed to reduce the quantity of Corsehouse water. However this blend is difficult to manage due to issues with low water levels in White Loch, and the chemical continues to persist in Corsehouse reservoir, causing ongoing detections.

Scottish Water has been in contact with health professionals throughout, and while the values fail the prescribed concentration or value (PCV) of 0.1µg/l, they do not pose a health risk. No customer contacts were received.

DWQR Assessment of Cause of Incident

The cause of the incident was the spraying of Agritox, a product containing MCPA, and the lack of a treatment process at Corsehouse to remove it from the water. Agritox is used for the treatment of thistles and rushes and was applied to one field in the catchment of Corsehouse reservoir. It appears that the chemical was applied appropriately, with a significant buffer strip between the area sprayed and watercourses, however the high summer rainfall may have contributed to the increased runoff into the reservoir.

DWQR Assessment of Actions Taken by Scottish Water

DWQR is satisfied with Scottish Water's actions in relation to this incident.

Several issues have been noted and are pertinent:

1. The catchment management team conducted a thorough investigation and found the source of the incident. They are continuing to liaise with the local farmer and also investigate alternative treatments to replace the use of Agritox.
2. Sampling was increased throughout the zone and is representative. Sampling continues while the issue is ongoing.

3. The initial notification to DWQR and other relevant agencies was that the pesticide failure only affected 2 consumers (the population of the sampled property). As a result only the health board (NHS Ayrshire and Arran) and local authority (East Ayrshire Council) relating to this address were notified. Corsehouse WTW also serves consumers in the local authorities North Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Councils and a small area of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde who were not notified about this incident, despite PHT understanding that this was a distribution zone-wide event and not restricted to the single property.
4. Due to the nature of this incident, DWQR is considering whether enforcement action is necessary to resolve the issue.

The event has been categorised as Significant. Scottish Water has identified a number of actions and DWQR accepts that these are appropriate. Additionally, DWQR has made one recommendation following this incident and will be monitoring to ensure both it and actions are completed prior to signing off the incident.

