

Mannofield RSZ Microbiological Failure 15 June 2012

DWQR Inspector:
William Byers

Summary of Incident

A sample was taken from a property in Aberdeen on 15 June 2012 in response to a complaint from a consumer of a taste in their water supply. The sample failed the microbiological standards with 16 Coliforms detected. A further two samples were then taken from the property over the next 3 days, both of which also recorded failures for the same parameter, with the latter one showing 63 Coliforms. Sampling in other neighbouring properties showed the supply to meet the standards providing confidence that the issue was restricted to the single address. By this stage, Scottish Water had determined the property was owned by Aberdeenshire City Council and arrangements were made for their investigation of the domestic plumbing system. A new kitchen tap was arranged to be fitted and once this was done, further sampling would be carried out to verify water quality.

A breakdown in communications between Scottish Water and The Council Environmental Health Team occurred however and this may have been due to key staff being absent due to long-term illness. The tap was replaced on 18 September by the Council and a sample taken by them following that work, again failed the Coliform standard. This status was not however shared with Scottish Water.

A review of the case in late November, established the status and formal resampling was again carried out to determine water quality. The sample taken on 28 November showed there to be 18 Coliform and 4 *E.Coli* present but sampling in neighbouring properties showed clear. A 'Boil Water Notice' was issued for this property until the cause could be determined. Further investigation of the property and the domestic plumbing system identified a possible problem with back-syphonage from a washing machine and a non-return valve was fitted on the mains supply pipe to the appliance. A sample taken on 18 December was clear of any contamination indicating the issue was resolved.

DWQR Assessment of Cause of Incident

This incident was declared by DWQR due to the failure of management processes to ensure the investigation and resolution of sample failures in a reasonable timescale. It is clear there was loss of focus within both Scottish Water and Aberdeen City Council to effect timely resolution of this case. The cause of the failing samples taken from the property is contamination of the supply due to poor plumbing practice causing back-syphonage from a washing machine.

DWQR Assessment of Actions Taken by Scottish Water

DWQR considers it unacceptable for the investigation and resolution of a microbiological failure to be permitted to lapse and remain unresolved for such an extensive period of time.

Scottish Water is responsible for pursuing the resolution of water quality issues at customer taps. Although they made periodic contact with the Council Environmental Health team to obtain updates, this indicates an inadequate provision of escalation paths for such cases where timescales for progress are not being met.



DWQR is also disappointed that this case shows insufficient attention was afforded to the information provided at the outset by this consumer, which should have alerted Scottish Water staff to the possibility of there being a back-syphonage and Byelaws issue. Had this been understood and had the information been shared with Aberdeen City Council, the root cause may have been determined at their first visit.

DWQR made two recommendations following this incident.