

Incident Assessment

Aviemore WTW Consumer concern and media interest Spring 2016

DWQR Inspector:
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Event No. 7768

Summary of Incident

Between March and June of 2016, 36 complaints were received by Scottish Water regarding water quality in the Badenoch and Strathspey area served by Aviemore WTW. In addition to this, two complaints were received directly by DWQR and one by the local authority. A local action group was formed, and the concerns of local consumers also received significant national media attention. Complaints were received for the following issues:

- Unpleasant taste (especially chlorine)
- Skin irritation
- Concerns regarding the proposal to introduce chloramination to the supply

In response to these concerns, Scottish Water instigated an Aviemore Taskforce to address the issues raised by consumers and to investigate and optimise operations both at the treatment works and in the network. A series of public meetings were held in the community to address their concerns, attended by relevant Scottish Water personnel, including senior management.

In response to the increased consumer concern, DWQR conducted a full audit of the treatment works in April 2016 and found no issues with the water treatment works which was working within normal parameters.

NHS Highland has reported no sustained increase in skin complaints since the water supply changed in 2012, and that the level of skin complaints within the community is the comparable to the national average.

Ongoing discussions are being held between Scottish Water, DWQR and NHS Highland.

Throughout this time period, water quality produced at Aviemore WTW fully complied with regulatory parameters.

DWQR Assessment of Cause of Incident

In 2012 Scottish Water constructed a new water supply to serve the Badenoch and Strathspey area. A number of complaints were received at this time due to increased hardness of the water and increased chlorine taste. DWQR investigated these complaints at the time and found that while the new supply fully complied with regulatory parameters and decreased the likelihood of non-compliance, consumer confidence was severely dented by the change in the water aesthetics.

After this time consumer complaints reduced to levels consistent with the Scottish Water average, but in March 2016 concerns re-emerged following a Scottish Water Board meeting which was held in Aviemore.



Scottish Water, having continued to investigate the source of any possible tastes or odours in the Aviemore supply, proposed that the disinfection type be changed to chloramination in an effort to reduce any possible aesthetic issues. It is likely that this Board meeting reignited the previous consumer concern, and the perceived lack of local dialogue regarding the potential introduction of chloramination fuelled the response.

DWQR Assessment of Actions Taken by Scottish Water

Scottish Water responded to the consumer complaints and media interest with a comprehensive approach involving community liaison and scrutiny of operational practices. However the consumer confidence lost in 2012 when the new water supply came into service may have been further eroded and it could take considerable efforts by Scottish Water to restore this.

Scottish Water have proposed to introduce chloramination to the treatment works. This will change the form of chlorine used as disinfectant throughout the network to one less noticeable to consumers. Chloramination is a robust process that is recognised by DWQR as an acceptable method of disinfection. Currently over 25% of the public water supply in Scotland is chloraminated and functions with no issues. As with all treatment processes, DWQR expect Scottish Water to carefully monitor and manage the process and to continue to address the concerns of the local population during the introduction of chloramination.

From its investigations, DWQR has concluded the following:

- The borehole source created in 2012 is well constructed and of good quality;
- The water treatment process at Aviemore is extremely robust, well operated and fit for purpose;
- The water supplied by the treatment works is fully compliant with the regulations and remains so through the distribution system;
- The disinfection strategy for the treatment works and distribution is suitable and sufficient;
- Chlorine levels at the works and throughout distribution are within normal limits.

The event has been categorised as Major. DWQR shall continue to closely monitor water quality and consumer concerns in the Aviemore distribution area during and after the introduction of chloramination.

