

# Consumer Complaint Determination

2024/11 – rusty particles in  
kettle

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

## **1 Basis of complaint**

The consumer contacted DWQR on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 to advise of an ongoing issue with reddish brown particles and deposits in their kettle.

## **2 Context of complaint**

Scottish Water was contacted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 with a complaint of 'red rusty looking particles' in a new, glass kettle. On the 1<sup>st</sup> December, samples were taken from the property, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> December Scottish Water's Public Health Team (PHT) wrote to the consumer to advise that the samples complied with regulatory standards and that the supply was safe to use and to drink.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> December the consumer contacted Scottish Water to advise that they were unhappy with the response, and would like to discuss it with the PHT, as the consumer was concerned that the water was not safe to drink. The PHT advised the Customer Engagement Centre (CEC) to tell the consumer that the sample complied with regulatory standards, that there was nothing in the analytical results to indicate that the supply was unsafe, and that any health concerns should be discussed with the consumer's General Practitioner. The consumer did not accept this response and requested that their concerns be escalated. Scottish Water's CEC advisor told the consumer that Scottish Water was 'responsible for water before it's been boiled', but the consumer wanted the PHT to call them to discuss the situation directly with them; they also wanted to escalate the complaint. The CEC Advisor

emailed the PHT, and the CEC Team Coach called the consumer to discuss their concerns. The complaint was then escalated to the CEC Duty Manager. On the 21<sup>st</sup> December the PHT emailed the CEC to reiterate that there were no issues with the quality of the supply, that the consumer should contact their GP if they had health concerns, and that further sampling could be carried out if required. A further sample was taken on the 28<sup>th</sup> December, and a letter, sample results and a factsheet on hardness in water were sent to the consumer.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January the consumer called the CEC again, reporting that the issue was ongoing, and that it was not white particles but 'rust and discoloured stains'. The CEC emailed the PHT, who called the consumer. The consumer was advised that the issue was unlikely to be iron, but could possibly be manganese, and that the glass kettle would allow any deposits to be seen. A second kettle with deposits, used on a Raeburn in the property, was explained by the PT as being caused by repeat reheating of the water in the kettle. The consumer remained dissatisfied and the PHT requested support from the Service Review Team (SRT).

On the 11<sup>th</sup> January the SRT sent an email to the consumer, who sent photographs and a video of the water in the kettles. The SRT responded that visually, the issue appeared to be caused by limescale, and again a factsheet on hardness was sent to the consumer. The consumer responded the same day, advising that the deposits were not white/grey as described in the hardness leaflet, but were brown/rust coloured – they remained concerned about the risk to their health. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> January the consumer emailed to report that they had had no response; on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January the consumer was advised that there was nothing further that Scottish Water could do. The consumer raised a formal complaint with Scottish Water on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February. A further sample was taken from the property on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, along with a nearby Service Reservoir. Both samples complied with regulatory standards.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> March, the consumer made a formal complaint against Scottish Water to the DWQR.

### **3 DWQR Assessment of complaint and the actions taken**

I am satisfied that the sample data from the consumer's property shows that the supply entering the property at the time of sampling was compliant with regulatory standards. The



deposits in the kettle are likely to be naturally occurring minerals and manganese, as well as iron from Scottish Water's iron mains, which have been concentrated through repeated boiling of water in the kettle. The transparent material of the kettle will have made the deposits more visible to the consumer. Scottish Water has demonstrated that the water entering the property met the required standards, so **the complaint is not upheld**.

I am however critical of the lack of investigation and of the information provided to the consumer by Scottish Water. Scottish Water advised the consumer that the issue was likely to have been caused by hardness in the supply, despite the consumer reporting that the supply was 'rusty' and that there were 'discoloured stains'. None of the samples taken by Scottish Water were analysed for calcium carbonate, but the supply is known historically by Scottish Water to be 'moderately soft'. The PHT advised the consumer that the issue was *'unlikely to be iron, it could possibly be the build-up of manganese'*. However, records of the materials of construction of Scottish Water's network show that its network that supplies the consumer's property are spun iron, and Scottish Water's sample data from the past three years for the consumers' supply zone shows clear evidence of iron pipe corrosion in the network. While the analytical data from the samples taken from the property showed at the time of sampling that the water complied with regulatory standards, it is reasonable to expect that there is a risk of build up of iron sediment in Scottish Water's network in the area. Additionally, Scottish Water's statutory risk assessment of the supply zone reports that the risk of discolouration in the network is 'almost certain' – this information should have been freely available to Scottish Water staff to access.

In conclusion, it may well be that repeated boiling and incomplete emptying of the kettle has allowed a build up of calcium carbonate in the consumer's kettle but I am of the opinion that the reddish brown sediment and discolouration is more likely to have been caused by iron from Scottish Water's network and manganese from the reservoirs supplying the water treatment works, both of which are known by Scottish Water to be a risk in the supply. Both issues are primarily aesthetic rather than a health concern.

#### **4 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Scottish Water reviews its response to complaints for rusty and discoloured particles in kettles and other appliances and updates its information leaflets accordingly.

