

Afton RSZ
Contamination
6 May 2014

DWQR Inspector:
William Byers

Event No. 5956

Event Category: Significant

Summary of Incident

During the investigation of a consumer complaint of a musty or earthy taste to the water supply within industrial premises near Cumnock in Ayrshire, Scottish Water had revisited the site to take further water samples for analysis. At this visit, on 8 May, the supply was noticeably more discoloured and had a fuel-like taste and odour. The water supply into the site was consequently shut off and wider investigation of the contamination problem commenced. Earlier investigation of the complaint had established there were no complaints from neighbouring consumers indicating the problem was contained within the site. Industrial Byelaws staff carried out an inspection within the site and identified a cross connection between a pumped processing water supply and the incoming mains supply as being the likely source of the contamination. Instruction was given to the site operator for immediate disconnection of the pipework.

A subsequent full Byelaws inspection of the site identified a number of contraventions. Sufficient remedial measures were carried out to protect against backflow into the public water mains to permit a partial restoration of the water supply on 21 May. This allowed a supply of water back in to the site to flush and cleanse site pipework of any residual contamination. A restriction on use – a don't drink, cook or wash notice, was also placed on the site to safeguard employees and visitors and bottled water was supplied. On 9 June, it was confirmed that all sampling had shown the supply to be clear of any contamination and restrictions were lifted. The main supply however remained isolated until the full remedial works could be completed.

DWQR Assessment of Cause of Incident

DWQR is satisfied that the likely cause of the contamination of the public water supply within the site was the cross connection with the boosted process water line. Samples showed a significant level of hydrocarbons in the supply and in consideration of the site processes, the pipework arrangement was such that it could readily permit this type of event to occur.

DWQR Assessment of Actions Taken by Scottish Water

Scottish Water took actions appropriate to the investigation of the original consumer complaint of musty taste and odour. When it became apparent that there were indications there may be contamination of the water supply, they took the necessary and swift action to isolate the site from the public water mains and thereby reduce the risk of contamination being experienced in the wider distribution system.

DWQR is satisfied that Scottish Water carried out appropriate investigation and sampling of the supply in the distribution system to establish the problem was contained within the industrial premises. Whilst appropriate notifications within reasonable timescale were made to health and regulatory stakeholders, DWQR is of the view there is a case for review of the alerting triggers and timescales for communications in such events.

Scottish Water had previously inspected these industrial premises in 2006. Their Byelaws policy states that for the degree of risk presented by this type of site, that inspection should be carried out every five years. Responsibility for compliance with the Byelaws however, firmly lies with site operators and in the intervening period, alterations to pipework had taken place within the site without the required notification to Scottish Water and in a manner that did not meet the requirements of the Byelaws.

In response to this event and as part of the investigation, Scottish Water carried out a full inspection of the site, identifying a number of contraventions, which were required to be made good prior to full restoration of the site water supply. DWQR considers compliance with the Water Supply Byelaws to be essential to minimise the risk of contamination of drinking water and supports the measures taken by Scottish Water to resolve this event.

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 two recommendations and will be monitoring to ensure all are completed prior to signing off the incident.

