

Subject:

Lessons from the Flint Water Crisis by Earl Jann

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By Earl Jann

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Mr. Jann is the chairman of the board of commissioners of the Erie County Water Authority.

In April 2014, Flint, Michigan switched their community's water source from Lake Huron to the far more acidic Flint River, which empties into the lake. This change - directed by government bureaucrats - corroded the city's pipes and caused lead and other contaminants to leak into their drinking water.

As a result, researchers found the incidence of area children with elevated lead levels in their blood more than doubled since the water crisis began. Lead is a neurotoxin and is very harmful to young children whose neurological systems are still developing.

This could never happen here - and it never should have happened in Flint.

The Erie County Water Authority (ECWA) sources our water from Lake Erie and the Niagara River. In our case, the river, fed by the lake, is the same acidity. Our water then endures a rigorous purification process that often exceeds regulations set by the federal government's Safe Drinking Water Act and the New York State Department of Health.

The ECWA is a professional utility, not a department of Erie County government. Our team of experts is the best in the business; our water treatment process is proven effective. And as a result, the water our customers drink from their tap is more pure than many brands of bottled water.

We know this because our water is tested 1,500 times per month at every stop along our system - at the source, in the treatment plant, in the pipes, and in your home. Our plants and pump stations are tested even more. Under this testing regime, our experts promptly discover abnormalities in the water.

This is what mystifies water treatment experts: the federal Environmental Protection Agency mandates much of this testing. If Flint were simply doing the minimum testing required by law, they, too, would have discovered the danger lurking in their water.

Like much of America, we also distribute across an aging infrastructure, and old pipes can leach. To eliminate this risk, ECWA adds caustic soda, which causes calcium in the water to bond to the surface of older pipes, coats the inside and seals off potential hazards. That's called passivation and with a proper program, leaching is eliminated.

That's why you sometimes see spots on your glasses when washing with our water. That's calcium; it protects you.

Water treatment professionals would have planned for the dangerous challenges of switching to a more acidic source. The acidic nature of the Flint River could have been treated; passivation would have helped, too. A

mere \$100 dollars a day would have averted this crisis - instead, lives are ruined and a billion dollars is not enough to fix this mess.

The mistakes made in Flint provide lessons for our customers. First, be confident the ECWA tests your water so much we identify challenges before they become problems. Second, you can drink water from your tap with more confidence than when you drink a bottle of water.

And finally: Never send a bureaucrat to do the job of experienced and specialized engineers and scientists who keep your water safe.

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