



At a Glance

Why We Did This Project

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this audit to examine the circumstances of, and the EPA's response to, contamination in the city of Flint, Michigan's community water system, including the EPA's exercise of its oversight authority. After Flint switched its drinking water supply in April 2014, inadequate water treatment exposed many Flint residents to lead.

In October 2016, the OIG issued a Management Alert to the EPA about specific factors that delayed its emergency response. Our current report evaluates additional matters concerning the agency's management controls when responding to the Flint contamination incident.

According to the MDEQ, more than \$400 million in public funds has been spent by the EPA and Michigan to address the Flint crisis. Eight other federal agencies also provided support.

This report addresses the following:

- *Ensuring clean and safe water.*
- *Compliance with the law.*

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Management Weaknesses Delayed Response to Flint Water Crisis

What We Found

The circumstances and response to Flint's drinking water contamination involved implementation and oversight lapses at the EPA, the state of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and the city of Flint. Since January 21, 2016, the EPA has overseen the implementation of its emergency administrative order and amendment issued in response to the drinking water contamination.

EPA Region 5 and EPA headquarters officials have worked with the MDEQ and Flint personnel to help improve the city's water system. As of May 2018, the state of Michigan and city of Flint have completed some actions and are working on remaining actions.

Michigan: Under the MDEQ's supervision, the Flint water system did not adhere to two Lead and Copper Rule requirements: (1) develop and maintain an inventory of lead service lines needed for sampling, and (2) maintain corrosion control treatment after the water source switch in April 2014. The rule requires utilities to minimize consumers' exposure to lead in drinking water. As the primacy agency, the MDEQ is responsible for enforcing this rule for Michigan water systems. The MDEQ did not issue a notice of violation or take other formal enforcement action regarding either requirement until August 2015. Instead, the MDEQ advised Flint public water system staff to conduct additional tests and to delay corrosion control treatment installation. The decision to delay corrosion control treatment prolonged residents' exposure to lead.

The EPA: The agency retains oversight and enforcement authorities to provide assurance that states with primacy comply with Safe Drinking Water Act requirements, such as those in the Lead and Copper Rule. However, Region 5 did not implement management controls that could have facilitated more informed and proactive decision-making when Flint and the MDEQ did not properly implement the Lead and Copper Rule. While Flint residents were being exposed to lead in drinking water, the federal response was delayed, in part, because the EPA did not establish clear roles and responsibilities, risk assessment procedures, effective communication and proactive oversight tools.

The EPA should strengthen its oversight of state drinking water programs to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency's response to drinking water contamination emergencies.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that EPA headquarters and EPA Region 5 use lessons learned from Flint to improve its oversight of Safe Drinking Water Act compliance. We also recommend that EPA headquarters revise the Lead and Copper Rule to improve the effectiveness of monitoring requirements. The EPA agreed with eight of the nine recommendations and provided adequate planned corrective actions and completion dates. Eight recommendations are resolved pending completion of corrective actions. Recommendation 1 is unresolved.