

News Release



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C.

For Immediate Release

July 19, 2018

Contact: Jennifer Kaplan Jeffrey Lagda Tia Elbaum
Phone: (202) 566-0918 (202) 566-2584 (202) 566-2548

Email: Kaplan.Jennifer@epa.gov
Lagda.Jeffrey@epa.gov
Elbaum.Kentia@epa.gov

EPA OIG finds management weaknesses delayed response to Flint water crisis *Recommends strengthening Safe Drinking Water Act oversight, revising Lead and Copper rule*

WASHINGTON – The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today issued a final report concluding that the circumstances and response to contamination in the city of Flint, Michigan’s community water system involved implementation and oversight lapses at federal, state and local levels. Nine recommendations are geared toward strengthening EPA oversight of safe drinking water programs and revising the Lead and Copper Rule to improve the effectiveness of monitoring requirements.

After Flint switched its drinking water supply in April 2014, inadequate water treatment exposed many Flint residents to lead. The OIG conducted an audit to examine the circumstances of and the EPA’s response to the contamination, including the federal agency’s exercise of its oversight authority. In the course of its review, the OIG issued an earlier, interim report that found the EPA had the authority and sufficient information to issue an emergency order to protect Flint residents seven months before issuing such an order.

In this final report, the OIG finds that, under the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality’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. The state agency’s decision to delay corrosion control treatment prolonged residents’ exposure to lead.

The OIG further finds that the EPA, which retains oversight and enforcement authorities to provide assurance that states with primacy comply with Safe Drinking Water Act requirements, did not implement management controls that could have facilitated more informed and proactive decision-making. 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.

-- more --

EPA NEWS RELEASE – PAGE 2

“While oversight authority is vital, its absence can contribute to a catastrophic situation,” said EPA Inspector General Arthur A. Elkins. “This report urges the EPA to strengthen its oversight of state drinking water programs now so that the agency can act quickly in times of emergency.”

Eight of the OIG’s recommendations are resolved pending completion of corrective actions by the EPA. The ninth is unresolved.

The OIG’s final and interim audit reports, related podcasts, videos and a photo gallery are available at <https://go.usa.gov/xUNSF>.

The OIG is an independent office within the EPA that performs audits and investigations of the EPA and the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, and their contractors, and prevents and detects fraud, waste and abuse. For more information, visit <http://www.epa.gov/oig>, follow the OIG on Twitter at @EPAoig (<https://twitter.com/EPAoig>) and view video coverage of topics impacting the American taxpayers at <youtube.com/epaoig>.

###