



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY
GRAND RAPIDS DISTRICT OFFICE



LIESL EICHLER CLARK
DIRECTOR

June 2, 2021

Mr. Ellis Mitchell, City Manager
City of Benton Harbor
200 East Wall Street
Benton Harbor, Michigan 49022

WSSN: **00600**

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

SUBJECT: Treatment Technique Violation Notice – Failure to Feed Coagulant Chemical

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Drinking Water and Environmental Health Division (DWEHD), records show the City of Benton Harbor (City) water treatment facility failed to add sufficient coagulant chemical as required by the Safe Drinking Water Act 1976 PA 399, as amended (Act 399); R 325.11008(2), *Complete treatment system; design and operation requirements*, for approximately forty-five (45) minutes on the morning of May 18, 2021. The operator in charge notified EGLE of the emergency immediately upon learning of the treatment lapse by phone and as required by R 325.12304(1), *Emergency procedure*.

The violation began around 7:00 a.m. on morning of May 18, 2021, when operation staff started the water treatment plant without ensuring the aluminum sulfate coagulant feed system was operational. It was identified and turned on around 45 minutes later during a routine walk-through of the treatment plant. The operator in charge was notified around 12:30 p.m. on the same day, and EGLE was then immediately notified at 12:45 p.m. by telephone.

While there was no violation of turbidity standards, water was likely distributed without the addition of coagulant chemical, which represents a risk to public health and is an emergency. Upon notification of the emergency, EGLE requested a precautionary boil water advisory be enacted by the City to mitigate the risk of pathogens in the treated water. Flushing the distribution system with chlorinated water and sampling for total coliform bacteria began on May 19, 2021. Upon evaluation of sample results and response procedures, the precautionary boil water advisory was lifted by the City with approval from EGLE on May 21, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Our investigation consisted of discussions with the City's operations team, documents submitted by the City regarding water treatment, sample results, and flushing practices. When treating surface water, an interruption in chemical coagulants poses an immediate public health risk. The response to investigate and mitigate the risk was necessary to protect public health. The investigation is now complete.

Administrative rule R 325.10403 requires that suppliers provide public notice not later than 30 days after learning of the violation by mail or direct delivery, and by any other means reasonably calculated to reach other persons regularly served by the system. Enclosed is a sample public notice. Please notify your consumers by **June 30, 2021**, and send this office a signed and dated copy of the notice that was issued, within 10 days of distributing the public notice.

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Additionally, this violation must be included in your 2020 Consumer Confidence Reports due by July 1, 2021.

The uninterrupted addition of coagulant chemical represents a fundamental barrier to contamination of the public water supply, and failure to add this chemical constitutes an emergency. **No later than June 30, 2021**, an emergency report must be submitted to EGLE per Rule 2304 (2) of Act 399. Consideration of corrective actions must include both physical improvements to the water plant and SCADA system, as well as operational controls or redundancies to guide staff during water plant operations.

If you have any factual information you would like us to consider regarding the violation identified in this Notice, please provide it in a written response by June 24, 2021. It is our intent to work with you on resolving this issue and determining the best method for achieving compliance. We anticipate and appreciate your cooperation in resolving this matter.

If you have any questions regarding this Violation Notice, please contact feel free to call the number below at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernie Sarkipato". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Ernie Sarkipato, P.E.
Surface Water Treatment Specialist
Grand Rapids District Office
Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance Division
616-307-0261

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Kimberly Thompson, City of Benton Harbor Clerk
Ms. Catherine Winn F&V Ops, Operator in Charge
Ms. Courtney Davis, Berrien County Health Department
Mr. Mike Bolf, Engineering Unit Supervisor, EGLE