

News Release



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

For Immediate Release
October 20, 2016
Contact: Jennifer Kaplan Jeffrey Lagda
Phone: (202) 566-0918 (202) 566-2584
Email: Kaplan.Jennifer@epa.gov
Lagda.Jeffrey@epa.gov

EPA had authority, sufficient information to issue emergency order protecting Flint residents from lead-contaminated water as early as June 2015 *Office of Inspector General issues ‘management alert’ to spur preventative actions now*

WASHINGTON – The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today issued a finding that the agency had the authority and sufficient information to issue an emergency order to protect Flint, Mich., residents from lead-contaminated water as early as June 2015. The EPA did not issue the emergency order until seven months later, on January 21, 2016.

This finding results from an ongoing OIG program evaluation charged with reviewing the circumstances of, and the EPA’s response to, contamination in the city of Flint’s community water system, including the agency’s exercise of its oversight authority. After Flint switched its drinking water supply in April 2014, inadequate treatment exposed many of nearly 100,000 residents to lead.

“These situations should generate a greater sense of urgency,” said EPA Inspector General Arthur A. Elkins. “Federal law provides the EPA with emergency authority to intervene when the safety of drinking water is compromised. Employees must be knowledgeable, trained and ready to act when such a public health threat looms.”

The purpose of an OIG “management alert” is to emphasize the immediacy of concerns and need for action to appropriate EPA officials. This interim report informs the Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance about factors that delayed the agency’s intervention in Flint using its emergency authority under Section 1431 of the Safe Drinking Water Act. As steps toward mitigating future crises, the OIG is recommending that the EPA update 25-year-old internal guidance on the use of emergency authority, and require the agency’s drinking water and water enforcement management and staff to attend training on the use of such authority.

For more information, read the management alert, listen to a podcast about it and watch a related video at <http://go.usa.gov/xkvwm>.

The OIG expects to issue a final report at the conclusion of its program evaluation.

Separate from the OIG’s program evaluation, which is being conducted by analysts, OIG investigators are participating in an investigation led by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Michigan regarding potential criminal violations that may have led to the water crisis in Flint. These processes have different objectives.

-- more --

Please visit the OIG’s website at <http://www.epa.gov/oig> for more information.

EPA OIG NEWS RELEASE – PAGE 2

The OIG is an independent office within the EPA that performs audits, program evaluations 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. By helping the EPA and CSB operate more economically, effectively and efficiently, the OIG contributes to improved environmental quality and human health. The OIG strives to provide solutions to problems that ultimately result in making America a cleaner and healthier place. 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>.

#