



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA
MAYOR JACQUES M. ROY

FOR IMMEDIATE USE AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

June 16, 2018

Office of the Alexandria Water Utility
Alexandria, Louisiana

ALEXANDRIA TIER ONE COLIFORM INCIDENT

**State and City Working through Incident; Aware of Disruption and Worry;
Regulators Must Err on the Side of Caution to Avoid Serious Threats to Public Health**

Alexandria, Louisiana—The City of Alexandria continues to work with the Louisiana Department of Health (“LDH”) to address and ensure the safety of citizens using the City system due to the incidence of positive coliform tests earlier this week at one Alexandria test site in the Rue Verdun area. Since that time, all tests (sample site, source, upstream, and downstream)—including now-expanded testing—have been negative or at this time show no growth. The initial concerns did not arise from a known extraordinary event. This is important, and is particularly noteworthy when considered with the level of chlorine indicated at the test sites, which levels were inconsistent with microbe survival (the chlorine levels were 1.33 ppm, far in excess of the 0.5 ppm minimum). While this does not indicate a false positive began the event, these are mitigating factors in favor of our continued safety.

However, the LDH protocol in place requires additional time for the last expanded-area samples, placed in incubation around 9:30 p.m., June 15, 2018, to have a 24-hour incubation. No modification of the system-wide boil order has been authorized at this time. Assuming there is no growth—and none is indicated so far—then by that time this evening, the City would have the statistical probabilities required for LDH to authorize lifting the system-wide order, absent any new factors of concern (and none is anticipated or indicated at this time).

Yesterday, the following statement was made from the City, which still holds today except that the expansion is now hours old and awaiting the completion of incubation:

“The City is expanding the scope of the investigative samples, which thus far have been negative, to ensure the safety of our customers. Likewise, out of an equal abundance of caution, the state’s boil advisory remains in effect. We know how disruptive these are for business; and while there is nothing special about what triggered this process, we must err on the side of caution” - from Michael P. Marcotte, the City of Alexandria Utilities Director.



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Glossary:

“no known extraordinary event”—this refers to the presence of *E. coli* in a tested sample as not flowing from, or arising out of, known increases to presence of coliforms such as following a disruption to the delivery very system, e.g., a line break, a treatment failure, or a flood. There are others, but these examples are indicative of system events when a reasonable regulator must be concerned about intrusion and dangers to public health from culprits like coliforms.

“false positive”— a test result incorrectly indicating that a particular condition or attribute is present; it may occur when a test, including as here for coliforms, indicates a positive, but due to environmental issues or test kits, lab, or other preparation or reading failures, is not truly indicative of the presence of a microbe. A false positive does not include a positive in later testing in the same area and source, as negative. A positive coliform test can occur in the absence of a substantial negative insult to a system, such as a small external input of feces or other microbe media, that gets introduced into the system near or on a testing station, creating a true positive that is immediately dissipated to a statistical insignificance. However, it is important to note, as competent regulators, the concern for spread or migration to other areas in the system is of paramount concern to exclude to reasonableness.

1. The city of Alexandria has enjoyed the highest quality water for nearly 100 years. Recent posts and stories regarding other Cenla water systems do not include Alexandria water and should not be confused with this incident. Alexandria is known for its water quality and the integrity of its system.
2. A coliform positive can occur without an extraordinary event, or special circumstance, and must be taken seriously. Regulators want to exclude the chance for migration of microbes; they can only do so with cooperation from the public and operators.
3. Be careful what you read on social media; it is oftentimes neither from an official source nor even factual, or, more dangerously at times, it can be mixed factual and non-factual information leading to a completely false conclusion.
4. Water safety is critical. The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) is the federal law that protects public drinking water supplies throughout the nation. Under the SDWA, EPA sets standards for drinking water quality and with its partners implements various technical and financial programs to ensure drinking water safety. The EPA, LDH, and City (the “water system operator”) are partners in this endeavor. A public water system provides water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed conveyances to at least 15 service connections or serves an average of at least 25 people for at least 60 days a year. Alexandria is a water system operator.

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5. Businesses and residents should follow advisories to ensure safety.
6. If this ends up—and the likelihood seems hopeful it will—that there is no presence of any dangerous microbe of statistical risk to the water system, citizens should keep in mind the position of the regulator is not hindsight but prevention. We are sorry for the inconveniences caused, and regulators robustly debate and consider these decisions. Know the decisions are being vetted at all times to ensure safety, first, and then the risks and utility of further orders are balanced against that concern.
7. Finally, and unfortunately, some local elected officials are discussing these issues on the radio and through media. Using information like this for purposes other than to inform, assist, and ensure public safety is sadly part of the modern process. So-called “fake news” is made more normative because it can be repeated many times while providing factual information takes time to ensure the completeness and accuracy of important public safety data points upon which residents and business can rely. Please know these officials have neither contacted the source regulators of the system nor appropriate City personnel to relate helpful and vetted information. Alexandria’s official source of information regarding the system operations is the director of the Utilities.

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