

## As Flint Water Crisis Enters Sixth Year, ‘Astounding’ Report Exposes Lies of Ex-Gov. Rick Snyder and Other Officials

"Coronavirus is the biggest story in the country, and rightfully so. But today, this enormous, exclusive, and damning story should be a very, very close second."

By [Jessica Corbett](#)

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*VICE on Thursday published an “[astounding](#)” and “[important](#)” exclusive report on how Rick Snyder, a Republican who served as Michigan’s governor from 2011 to 2019, “knew about Flint’s toxic water—and lied about it.”*

The report, based on a year-and-a-half investigation, comes almost six years after an emergency manager appointed by Snyder [switched](#) Flint’s water supply from Detroit’s system to the Flint River. Since that move on April 25, 2014, city residents have endured health consequences resulting from a deadly *Legionella pneumophila* bacterial outbreak and exposure to heavy metals and cancer-causing contaminants.

6 years after Flint began using a toxic water source that sickened its residents, [@VICE](#) uncovered payoffs, whistleblower silencing, a shady financial deal, a coverup, & the former gov. who presided over it all. By [@JordanChariton](#) & me [#FlintWaterCrisis](#) <https://t.co/Gt2fjv280s>

— Jenn Dize [@JennElizabethJ](#) [April 16, 2020](#)

As Jordan Chariton and Jenn Dize reported Thursday:

Hundreds of confidential pages of documents obtained by VICE, along with emails and interviews, reveal a coordinated, five-year cover-up overseen by Snyder and his top officials to prevent news of Flint’s deadly water from going public—while there was still time to save lives—and then limit the damage after the crisis made global headlines.

All told, the waterborne bacterial disease may have [killed](#) at least 115 people in 2014 and 2015, and potentially more whose pneumonia wasn’t officially considered Legionnaires’ disease, the illness caused by Legionella. In addition to the outbreak, Flint’s water supply was contaminated with lead and other heavy metals, harmful bacteria, carcinogens, and other toxic components. This wreaked havoc on Flint residents, leaving them with a laundry list of illnesses, including kidney and liver problems, severe bone and muscle pain, gastrointestinal problems, loss of teeth, autoimmune diseases, neurological deficiencies, miscarriages, Parkinson’s disease, severe fatigue, seizures, and

volatile mood disorders.

Beyond this, the long-term effects of heavy-metal poisoning takes years to develop, meaning many ill residents' conditions are worsening as the years go on. Many have said they still rely on bottled water to avoid using the water that comes through their pipes and into their homes, schools, and businesses.

The report detailed actions of local and state officials both leading up to and during the public health crisis, which continues today. It is based on interviews and documents from a criminal investigation of Snyder's administration that was led by special prosecutor Todd Flood from 2016 until last year, when newly elected state Attorney General Dana Nessel [fired](#) Flood and others.

The prosecution team led by Flood charged 15 Flint and Michigan officials with [various crimes](#); seven of those cases were resolved with plea agreements. In January 2019, Nessel [appointed](#) Fadwa Hammoud as the state's solicitor general and assigned her to take over the Flint criminal cases.

In June, the state's prosecution team dismissed all pending criminal charges against the eight remaining defendants and launched a new probe based on concerns about the initial one. That decision, as *Common Dreams* [reported](#), "elicited fresh concerns and demands for justice."

*VICE* noted that with Flint about to enter its sixth year of the water crisis, "the clock for justice is also ticking." Unless the Republican-controlled state legislature intervenes, the [statute of limitations](#) for filing new felony misconduct-in-office charges will run out next week. Chariton highlighted that detail in a series of tweets about the reporting Thursday.

the statute of limitations to press new felony misconduct in office charges related to the [#FlintWaterCrisis](#) runs out in 9 days (4/25/14 to 4/25/20). Some lawmakers have called to extend it from 6 years to 10 years...so far unsuccessfully.

— Jordan (@JordanChariton) [April 16, 2020](#)

In August, a pair of state legislators from Flint proposed legislation to extend the statute of limitations from six years to 10. Karen Weaver, then-mayor of Flint, [expressed](#) support for the proposal, declaring at the time that "there is no time limit that can be put on the amount of suffering that we have faced, nor the amount of pain as a result of the loss of life."

Weaver told *VICE* that the governor's office repeatedly dangled "a pot of money for different things" and pressured her to publicly claim that the city's water was safe. The outlet reported that "after repeated attempts by the Snyder administration to get Mayor Weaver to cooperate proved unsuccessful, the promised funding suddenly became unavailable."

The outlet added:

Weaver was even pressed to say the water in Flint's schools was safe to drink, according to former city government officials familiar with the administration's

overtures to Weaver. Weaver didn't, and soon after, the remaining free water-bottle stations Flint residents relied on were prematurely shut down.

When the stations were shuttered, Weaver attempted to reopen them by turning to the \$48.8 million [rainy-day fund](#) that was allocated to Flint from the state's 2017-2018 budget. But when Weaver looked, the money was gone. The Snyder administration had been using these funds—meant to be under Flint's control—to pay for the water stations.

In addition to detailing interactions between Weaver and the Snyder administration from the mayor's perspective, the report highlighted a few findings from the Flint criminal investigation documents:

- Snyder was warned about the dangers of using the Flint River as a water source a year before the water switch even occurred.
- Snyder had knowledge of the Legionella outbreak in Flint as early as October 2014, six months after the water switch—and 16 months earlier than he claimed to have learned of the deadly outbreak in testimony under oath before Congress.
- Communication among Snyder, his top officials, and the state health department spiked in October 2014 around the same time state environmental and health officials traded emails and calls about the Legionella outbreak in Flint.

Snyder and his attorneys did not respond to *VICE*'s requests for comment. Several other officials named in the exhaustive report also declined to respond or comment, with some of them citing the ongoing criminal investigation.

The reporting provoked a fresh wave of [criticism](#) directed at government officials involved in the crisis and was published as the international community contends with a global pandemic that has infected more than two million people since late last year.

Sharing Chariton and Dize's Flint piece on Twitter Thursday, *VICE* senior editor Maxwell Strachan [wrote](#) that "coronavirus is the biggest story in the country, and rightfully so. But today, this enormous, exclusive, and damning story should be a very, very close second."

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