

Michigan Officials Quietly Gave Bottled Water To State Employees Months Before Flint Residents

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John Whitaker, executive director of Midwest Food Bank, carries a case of water that was donated to Flint residents on January 27. CREDIT: AP Photo/Darron Cummings

The Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget [decided to haul water coolers into the Flint state building](#) in January of 2015 out of concern over the city's water quality, a year before bottled water was being made available to residents, according to [documents](#) obtained by Progress Michigan.

Flint switched its water source from Detroit to the Flint River in April 2014, which is now known to have caused lead to leach into the city's tap water. After two boil advisories [were issued](#) in August and September of 2014, the city sent residents a notice that the level of trihalomethanes (TTHMs), which can cause liver and kidney problems, had exceed federal limits, although they were told that it was still fine to use the water and no corrective actions needed to be taken.

But concerns raised over water quality were enough for officials in the state's capitol of Lansing to decide to give state employees the option to drink bottled water from coolers, rather than from water fountains. Coolers were placed next to the fountains on each occupied floor, according to the documents, and were to be provided "as long as the public water does not meet treatment requirements."

 CREDIT: Progress Michigan

For residents, however, it took researchers uncovering elevated levels of lead in children's bloodstreams for a lead advisory to finally be issued in September of 2015. Residents were told not to drink the water and a public health emergency was declared by the Genesee County Health Department in October, and Flint's mayor declared a state of emergency in December. The National Guard was activated in January of this year to distribute water from five fire stations — a full year after water was brought in for state employees out of concern over water quality.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R), whose administration [some have said](#) made the decision to switch to the Flint River, has claimed he didn't know about the water problems until recently. But the plan to use that source was evaluated and rejected by the city's emergency manager in 2012, according to a deposition. And while the purported reason for making the change in the first place was to save money while another pipeline was being built, [leaked emails show](#) that the city could have stayed with Detroit's water and saved the same amount of money anyway.

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