

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0535

PLEASE REPLY TO:
WASHINGTON DC OFFICE
2221 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
☐ WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0535
PHONE: (202) 225-2201
FAX: (202) 225-7854

DISTRICT OFFICE:
LOS ANGELES OFFICE
10124 SOUTH BROADWAY
SUITE 1
☐ LOS ANGELES, CA 90003
PHONE: (323) 757-8900
FAX: (323) 757-9506

May 12, 2016

Mr. Matthew Rodriquez
Secretary for Environmental Protection
California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)
1001 I Street
P.O. Box 2815
Sacramento, CA 95812-2815

Dear Secretary Rodriquez:

Thank you for your email dated March 9, 2016, in response to my concerns about water quality issues in the City of Gardena (a copy of which is attached). I appreciate the information you provided regarding the background and history of water quality problems in Gardena and the ongoing efforts by Golden State Water Company (GSWC) and the Division of Drinking Water (DDW) to address these problems. I write to request a dated, written update on these issues on CalEPA letterhead.

Individuals and families in the City of Gardena, as well as other communities served by GSWC, have a right to clean water to drink, cook and bathe. Indeed, everyone has a right to safe, clean drinking water in their homes. No one should have to live with dirty, odorous, or contaminated water coming out of their faucets.

Since early 2015, several residents of the City of Gardena have complained about black, foul-smelling tap water coming from their faucets, showers, and toilets. Some residents have refused to drink this "black water," purchasing bottled water instead. It appears the complaints were concentrated in the Gramercy Place neighborhood.

Unfortunately, these complaints are not new. As you mentioned in your email, there has been a history of customer complaints regarding the quality of the water provided by GSWC to its customers in Gardena, going back to at least 1999. These complaints related to the water's taste, odor, color and particles.

In your email, you stated, "On March 9, 2015, the service line tap location was relocated to the water main on Gramercy Place. Apparently there have not been any water quality complaints in the Gramercy Place neighborhood since that time." You also stated that the issue appears to have been resolved, and that the cause is believed to have been "sediments, minerals, iron, manganese, and biofilm."

Furthermore, DDW instructed GSWC to complete the flushing of a portion of their water system in the Gramercy Place neighborhood, provide local residents with advance notice of flushing activities via postcards and/or door hangers, provide a full incident report, and update their Operations and Maintenance Plan. While you explained that GSWC has taken all of these actions, you nevertheless noted, "DDW is still working with the company to resolve some issues and to modify their procedures."

Given the impact that contaminated drinking water can have on a community, I believe further information is needed for myself and Gardena residents to remain confident in the water they use to drink, bathe and sustain their daily lives. Therefore, I would like an update of the situation. Specifically, I would like to obtain answers to the following questions: What were the findings of the incident report? What was the likely impact on residents who used the water contaminated with sediments, minerals, iron, manganese, and biofilm? How has GSWC updated their Operations and Maintenance Plan? What are the issues that still need to be resolved? What plans are in place to notify local residents of progress on these issues? What is the likelihood of this problem arising in the future? Most importantly, I would like to know in what ways GSWC's procedures need to be modified and how these modifications will help to maintain water quality and safety.

I know you share my concerns about drinking water quality in the City of Gardena, and I appreciate your commitment to clean, safe drinking water for individuals and families throughout the State of California. I appreciate your attention to my concerns, and I look forward to your official, written response to these outstanding questions within the next 30 days.

Sincerely,



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

MW:ks

Sengstock, Kathleen

From: Rodriquez, Matthew [REDACTED] Matthew.Rodriquez@calepa.ca.gov
Sent: Wednesday, March 09, 2016 9:08 PM
To: Jimenez, Blanca
Cc: [REDACTED] Garte.Chona@EPA; Solomon.Gina@EPA
Subject: RE: Follow up on Gardena water quality

Dear Ms. Jimenez.

As Congresswoman Waters requested, we did look further into the situation concerning the water quality issues in the City of Gardena. Here is what we found:

Background:

The Golden State Water Company – Southwest (GSWC) has had a history of customer complaints about its water due to taste, odor, color, and particles. In 1999 in an effort to address ongoing complaints, the company began adding polyphosphate to the water as a corrosion control agent, in the hope of ‘stabilizing water quality’. Over the following decade, there was seemingly no improvement in the water quality, and it appears there was an increase in complaints. There was concern that the polyphosphate was essentially acting as a fertilizer and promoting biofilm growth in the pipes. During this time, the only measured water quality issue in the system was a low chlorine residual. There weren’t actual violations, however.

In 2010, GSWC began phasing out the polyphosphate additive and instead focused on systematically flushing out the pipes in the system. In the ensuing years, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of aesthetic complaints from consumers.

The State Division of Drinking Water (DDW) approved the cessation of the polyphosphate corrosion control agent, and concluded that the water is not corrosive. There have been no lead and copper rule violations in the system.

Incident:

On January 21, 2015, GSWC received a complaint of black water at a single residence at South Gramercy Place in Gardena. It’s unclear how quickly an operator arrived to investigate, but by the time they did the problem had cleared up. No other complaints came in on that same date, however, a neighbor also informally indicated she had experienced some cloudy water. In the month of January 2015, there were a total of 33 formal complaints about water quality in the City of Gardena. No recent flushing of the system had occurred in that area, and no other water main work had been done. The operator did not collect a sample, apparently because the problem had cleared.

An operator did return on Feb 4, 2015 to collect a sample and the sample was tested for total coliform and E. coli, and was negative for both.

The homeowner brought a home filtration cartridge to the GSWC office on January 26 (4 days after the incident). That filter cartridge was tested for bacteria and heavy metals, but not for any other contaminants. The metals found were iron oxide, calcium carbonate, silica, and traces of sulfate, copper, and phosphate. No lead was reported in the analysis. The filter cartridge did contain an extensive growth of bacteria, including primarily *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which is common in water system biofilms. The lab report cautioned that some of the bacterial growth could have occurred on the filter after it was removed and while it was transported to the water company and the lab, since it was apparently not refrigerated during that time. Amoeba were also mentioned in the report, but not characterized further.

Further investigation revealed that this customer and her neighbor were tapped into a 4 inch cast iron pipe that was installed in 1955. This was a different pipe than the one that served others in the Gramercy Place neighborhood, and the pipe had two 45-degree fittings near the junctions for the two homes that had water complaints. The 45-degree

bends would create turbulence in the system and could promote growth of biofilm and disturbance of that biofilm with flow changes.

On March 9, 2015, the service line tap location was relocated to the water main on Gramercy Place. Apparently there have not been any water quality complaints in the Gramercy Place neighborhood since that time.

The GSWC reported to the DDW that the cause of the incident was: "sediments, minerals, iron, manganese, and biofilm".

Since that time the GSWC has been instructed by the DDW to:

- 1) Complete flushing that portion of their water system
- 2) Provide local residents with advance notice of flushing activities via postcards and/or door hangers
- 3) Provide a full incident report
- 4) Update their Operations and Maintenance Plan

The company has done all of these things, although we understand the DDW is still working with the company to resolve some issues and to modify their procedures. In the meantime, the DDW is meeting with the company quarterly and a meeting was held earlier this month.

Summary:

So, it appears there have been water quality issues in Gardena, but they do not appear to involve actual health threats, but rather aesthetic issues. The black water that was reported last year appears to have been confined to 1-2 homes, and has been resolved and not recurred. The cause is postulated to be "sediments, minerals, iron, manganese, and biofilm." And, there is no evidence of a lead problem in the Gardena system.

The Congresswoman should feel free to let us know if she has further questions.

Sincerely,

Matt Rodriquez