



City Acts Quickly to Eliminate Drinking Water Contaminant

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Bloomington— The City of Bloomington monitors the public water supply for treatment process control, quality control and regulatory compliance. On Thursday, February 4, during the analysis of regular weekly samples laboratory staff noted that one chemical compound, methylene chloride, was above the maximum contaminant limit throughout the distribution system. As noted below, water plant staff samples and tests Bloomington’s drinking water far more frequently than required by law to ensure that it meets or exceeds the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) requirements for safe drinking water.

The chemical was traced to the water treatment plant. Plant staff immediately shut off the water treatment feed from the water plant into the Bloomington water distribution system and switched solely to the Minneapolis water supply that the city uses as a source to augment Bloomington’s water. City staff immediately contacted and consulted with the Minnesota Department of Health’s (MDH) Drinking Water Protection Division as to the issue.

Staff traced the methylene chloride to a stripping product being used by a maintenance contractor working at the plant. The product was unknowingly introduced into the treatment process sometime between Saturday, January 30, and Tuesday, February 4. The contractor’s work was immediately suspended pending resolution of the matter. A majority of Bloomington’s distribution system did not have detectable levels of the chemical after Saturday, February 6.

Certified test results showed the highest short-term exposure of methylene chloride to the public in the distribution system was 23 ug/L or parts per billion (ppb); nowhere near the short-term health advisory limit of 10,000 ppb for a one-day exposure or 2,000 ppb per day for a 10-day exposure. As this level did not exceed the short-term exposure level, the MDH did not require a health advisory or “Do Not Drink Order.”

A health advisory limit is a non-regulatory, health-based reference level of chemical traces in drinking water at which there are no adverse health risks when ingested over various periods of time. Such levels are established by the EPA for one day, 10 days, long-term and life-time exposure periods, and contain a wide margin of safety.

The annual average exposure (average of four quarterly tests) to the public for this event was 5.8 ppb, just slightly above the EPA maximum contaminant limit of 5.4 ppb. This regulatory violation requires that the City notify the public. The formal Notice of Violation was posted in the *Sun Current* the week of February 22.

Maximum contaminant limits are based on life-time exposure to a chemical and take into account treatment cost, benefits, and the ability of a public water system to detect and remove the contaminants using suitable treatment technologies. As applied to this event, a 150-pound person drinking at least two liters of 5.4 ppb contaminated water per day for 70 years has a one in one million chance of developing cancer.

During the last several weeks, some residents experienced various tastes, odors and cloudy water issues. These are all common characteristics of treated surface waters, as Minneapolis water is, and are not related to the chemical contamination.

After the plant was thoroughly cleaned and tested, the MDH confirmed levels of methylene chloride at the plant were well below accepted limits. On Thursday, February 18, the plant was placed back in service.

Bloomington closely monitors the public water supply at the Sam Hobbs Water Treatment Plant, the 82nd Street Reservoirs, which receives water purchased from the City of Minneapolis, and 30 distribution sites strategically located throughout the city. The monitoring sites are regularly sampled by Utility staff three times per month or approximately once a week. This sampling rate meets, and in many instances, exceeds the requirements of the MDH, which regulates municipal drinking water systems. William Lloyd/Tri-City Analytical Laboratory staff analyzes each sample and monitors for regulated and unregulated contaminants. On average, the laboratory performs more than 430 analyses on the public water supply per day or more than 158,000 per year.

More information about the public water supply can be found in the City's annual water quality report on the City of Bloomington's website at www.ci.bloomington.mn.us, keywords: Water quality.

For more information, call Public Works Director Karl Keel at 952-563-4581 or Utilities Superintendent Robert Cockriel at 952-563-8774.

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