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Coordinator

FLEMINGTON BOROUGH OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

100 Main Street, Flemington NJ 08822



Public Statement Regarding Recent Boil Water Advisory

1/27/2025

Dear Residents and Business Owners,

The Borough of Flemington's Office of Emergency Management wishes to address the circumstances surrounding the recent boil water advisory that followed a water main break on January 14, 2025. While all regulatory protocols were followed to the letter of the law throughout this event, we recognize that aspects of communication could have been more effective, and we are committed to improving our systems and practices moving forward. Because social media chatter continues to misinform and alarm the public, we are providing a time line of factual information below.

On Tuesday, January 14th, at approximately 2:00 PM, MSP Contracting, engaged in the Main Street Sewer and Water Reconstruction Project, accidentally damaged an 8-inch water main at the intersection of Church Street and Main Street. The break was significant, severing the main and causing a loss of water pressure in the affected area. Water service to properties between Mine Street and Church Street was disrupted for approximately three hours while emergency repairs were made. By 6:00 PM, the water main was restored, and service resumed.

Although state regulations allow a municipality up to 6 hours to report a water pressure dip to the state, at approximately 4:30 PM, NJSAFE Water contacted Public Works Department Director Mike Campion following an anonymous complaint called into the state. Director Campion clarified the situation to the state, advising the damage had occurred by the contractor while the pipe was exposed during road reconstruction and not while buried underground.

Later that evening, at approximately 10:00 PM, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) contacted Mr. Campion and directed the issuance of a precautionary boil water advisory as per state protocol.

This precautionary advisory is a standard protocol due to the loss of pressure in a water system and the Borough was given until 2pm on January 15th (24 hours from the original water main break) to complete the required notices of the advisory.

By 7:00 AM the next morning, the Office of Emergency Management began notifying stakeholders, including local school districts and businesses, of the advisory while waiting for NJDEP's required approval of public messaging. All alerts were issued by 9:00 AM, well within the required regulatory timeframe, via RAVE Alert, the Borough's website, and social media platforms.

Unfortunately, at 10:40 AM on January 15th, MSP Contracting struck a second water main in the same location. This secondary break delayed scheduled water sampling and extended, the duration of the boil water advisory. Borough officials coordinated with County OEM, the County Health Department, and local school superintendents to address the implications of this delay. Schools implemented measures

such as off-site food preparation and portable handwashing stations, while businesses received additional guidance from county officials.

Throughout January 15th, social media rumors and conflicting reports from external sources heightened public concern. Despite efforts to provide accurate updates, the unexpected delay in water testing created uncertainty regarding the timeline for lifting the advisory. Testing commenced on January 16th at 9:40 AM, with samples sent to a certified lab for analysis. During this time, the Borough organized a water distribution program at Borough Hall.

By January 17th, public frustration grew over mixed messages being circulated by Raritan Township, social media, NJ 101.5, News 12 and TAP. At 4:45 PM, the Borough received confirmation that all water quality tests had passed, and the NJDEP authorized the lifting of the advisory. Alerts were issued through all channels, officially resolving the situation by 5:00 PM.

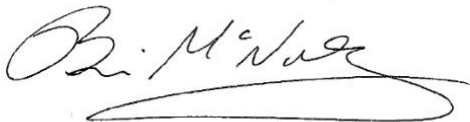
While the Borough followed all regulatory timelines and protocols, we recognize that the situation highlighted areas for improvement. Messaging about the second water main break and the subsequent testing delay could have been clearer and timelier, avoiding unnecessary confusion.

Additionally, the rare occurrence of a boil water advisory in Flemington may have contributed to a lack of understanding among residents and businesses about the differences between a precautionary advisory and a mandatory one. This underscores the need for more proactive public education on such matters. We are in the process of posting information about boil water advisories on our website.

We also acknowledge the limitations of the Borough's RAVE alert system during this event, with a failure rate of approximately 50% in distributing critical notifications. This issue hindered our ability to ensure consistent and widespread communication. As a result, we are actively exploring the implementation of a more robust alert system to better serve our community in future emergencies.

The Borough remains committed to learning from this experience and taking meaningful steps to enhance our response and communication strategies. We regret the inconvenience caused to our residents and businesses and appreciate your patience and understanding.

Should you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Flemington Office of Emergency Management. Your feedback is invaluable as we work to strengthen our community's emergency preparedness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. McNally", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Sincerely,
Sgt. Brian McNally
OEM Coordinator
Flemington Office of Emergency Management