

Brixham Community Event

Thursday 12th September 2024
Scala Hall, Brixham

This document provides a summary of the key themes and questions addressed on the evening. Whilst the event itself wasn't recorded, we wanted to share an overview of what was discussed with those who couldn't attend.

Operational

Cause of contamination

“ We established the cause and site of the ingress as a priority very early on. We isolated the issue and fixed the damaged asset, and we are continuing our investigations into the precise circumstances in which the event occurred.

There is no indication of cryptosporidium in our network before this incident occurred. ”

Is it true that SWW were alerted to the risk of cryptosporidium entering its network at this source 2 years ago?

“ No, that’s not true. ”

Was the cryptosporidium contamination a result of ingress into an air valve? Why wasn’t it protected? How many air valves do you have? What is the maintenance schedule?

“ There is a legal process underway so we cannot go into detail, however, I can confirm that we have 10,000 air valves across the region. We take a risk-based approach to how we maintain the assets. This is the approach we take to our whole network. We will share more in due course once the investigations are completed and can then be made public. ”

Were there bats in the tank?

“ No, there were no bats found inside the tank. ”

How can we be sure this won’t happen again?

“ We’ve done works across the whole of our estate. We’ve installed UV and filters, and you can see the results, all of this is to ensure that there is no reoccurrence. ”

Hillhead

When will the traffic lights go from along the Hillhead road?

“ The traffic lights were erected because it is a 60mph road and we needed safe access to the site by contractors and workers accessing it more frequently than usual. We are discussing with the Council measures that can be put in place to give safe access to the site without the traffic lights there. We'd like to remove the traffic lights as soon as possible. ”

What work is ongoing at the Hillhead site and how long is it likely to be?

“ During the incident and as extra layers of protection, we have installed UV and micro filtration units at the site. These were installed rapidly and urgently to put those measures in place as quickly as possible. We are now retrospectively installing cladding and protective covers because these measures will be in place for some time. The time scales for dismantling the scaffolding on site will be a matter of months rather than weeks. ”

What is happening regarding water pressure in Hillhead?

“ The pressure at Hillhead should now have returned to normal. If it hasn't, we can investigate. ”

Leaks in the Hillhead area | Water on the main road from Hillhead reservoir

“ When we inspected our reservoir, the DWI was present, and it was confirmed that there were no leaks from the reservoir and no ingress into the tank. We did roof tests and surveys, and we went inside to inspect the tank.

Regarding the water running down the road, we thought it was groundwater and we dug down in the vicinity of our tank and did find groundwater. We found a leak in the pipe to the tank and replaced the whole 15-inch pipe in response to this incident. However, we found no leaks that would have resulted in ingress of cryptosporidium into the tank. ”

Investigation

How long are the investigations likely to be ongoing and when will we know the outcome?

“ Investigations are being undertaken by the DWI, which is the usual course of events with incidents like this. We are not in control of the timeline, and we'll have to let it take its course.

In parallel to that we are carrying out our own internal investigation and we will make the outcome of that investigation public in due course. ”

Contact

We have set up a dedicated line to support any outstanding queries.

Please contact us on: 03447 282 990

Why couldn't residents contact South West Water at the time of the incident and afterwards? I am still having difficulty getting hold of your call centre.

“ There was a large increase in contacts during the incident, we did our best to make sure that we had a good presence in the local area at that time, so that we were available for people. We brought in additional staff, and we tried to ensure we put in extra measures like meetings and face to face opportunities.

We are sorry if it was frustrating to get hold of us at the time. ”

Timeline

You confirmed that the water was safe to drink when you knew the investigations were ongoing and that it would take at least 24 hours for the sample results to come back to confirm whether or not there was cryptosporidium in your network. How did that happen and who signed off and approved that communication?

“ We have acknowledged there were some things we have done very well in response to this incident and there are some things that we have done not so well. This is one of those things. At the time that the communications went out, we had not received any information or evidence from the data that we had reviewed, both from the Public Health Authority, our partners, and all routine sampling that would indicate if cryptosporidium was in our network. In hindsight, that was not correct, and we will be reflecting on how we did things in this instance so that lessons can be learned. ”

Why did you not put in place the boil water notice any quicker?

“ We have heard that some people in the community have reported illness during the period prior to this incident. However, we only knew about the possibility of illness due to cryptosporidium after contact was received from the Public Health Authority and we began to receive contacts reporting illness in the Hillhead area. ”

When did you go to UKHSA?

“ We were first alerted to the possibility of cryptosporidium in the area by National Health on Monday at 4:00 PM via a phone call to confirm 8 cases of cryptosporidium in the area had been reported.

From that point there was a lot of collaboration in multi-agency meetings involving public health bodies, our partners, and ourselves with umpteen telephone calls and meetings to share information and ascertain the position.

It was not until Tuesday that we began to get an increase in contacts during which time we were waiting for sample results to come back, which they did the following morning.

Cryptosporidium is often present in the environment, until then we had no evidence that it was in our network. On Wednesday morning when we got the results back and it became evident that there was, we immediately issued the boil water notice. ”

Interventions and safety

How do you know you have managed to clear your network of cryptosporidium and also that our own internal pipe work is OK, when you were flushing and ice pigging your own network, but we have not done that with our own pipes?

“ Customer pipes are much smaller than our water mains. This means water moves through your plumbing at much greater velocity than on our network.

This speed of movement creates enough force to clean the pipes in customers' homes without additional flushing processes.

It is more difficult for South West Water's pipes which are much larger in most cases. It is difficult to remove the biofilm by achieving the requisite velocity of water through those pipes and therefore we took the decision to do ice pigging as another measure. ”

What is a safe level of cryptosporidium in the network? You have told us that there will be some in the network normally, but how do we know whether that is safe? We feel like we've been lied to, and stuff has been deleted from your website.

“ Regarding transparency, we are the first company to publish cryptosporidium samples during an event like this on our website.

The regulations say that a safe level should be assessed on the basis of a risk-based decision. But in the UK there is no specific number and no prescribed level.

We also sought advice from our partners from other water companies and other UK health authorities including overseas experts to ascertain the position.

There were trace levels in our network, but we got advice that there is no risk to human health from those traces. ”

Claims and compensation

Why was it so hard to get my claim settled and why have you worked so hard to minimise the compensation that people receive? DACB told me that I should consider instructing my own solicitor.

“ We have given compensation to our customers to compensate them for not being able to have normal use of their water during this incident.

Other compensation is being dealt with under financial guidelines set up by our partners and each case will be unique.

We have done our best to try and make the process streamlined. We have agreed a process to ensure that, but there are procedures which those dealing with those claims must follow, including letting people know that they can instruct their own lawyers if they want to.

We are doing our best to try to make sure that you don't have to and that the process is as straight forward as possible. ”

When will customers who have agreed a final settlement received their payment?

“ We have agreed a process with DAC Beachcroft to ensure that payments are made within seven days of us receiving the evidence and a final settlement agreed. ”

We provided compensation to household customers impacted by the boil water notice. The final compensation amount was more than the amount of an average annual dual service water bill.*

* Based on the average annual South West Water bill of £476 (www.discoverwater.co.uk/annual-bill). The £50 Government Contribution has already been deducted from this figure. Bills for each household vary based on factors such as household size, water usage and tariff.

Local investment

What investment are you doing in the area to help the community to restore itself back to normal?

“ We are utilising a neighbourhood fund which is being repurposed to help to support the people of Brixham. We are also working with local authorities to look at how we can work together to restore trust across the region. ”

Water source

Where does the water come from that you put through our taps?

“ Over 90% of the water supplied comes from rivers and reservoirs. It is then pumped to our water treatment works where it is treated. It is then delivered to homes and businesses via a network that includes service reservoirs, which are balancing tanks so that we can balance the supply and demand. ”

CEO salary

Why has the CEO taken a pay rise of 40% during a time when this incident is occurring?

“ The CEO alongside all South West Water colleagues received an inflationary increase this year but did not take a bonus last year or the year before. The long term award that was received in 2021 was invested back into shares in the company and was not cash. ”