



DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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*****Press Release*****

United Utilities fined for drinking water offence

At Preston Crown Court today, United Utilities was fined £300,000 and additional costs of £150,000 were agreed.

On 19 July 2017, United Utilities pleaded guilty to the supply of water unfit for human consumption for an event in August 2015 where the detection of *Cryptosporidium* in water supplies from Franklaw water treatment works required 700,000 people to boil their water for a prolonged period. The event came about following problems with work by United Utilities to repair a leak in a major aqueduct that supplies water from Franklaw works. A planned change in operations allowed the entry of contaminated water to the treatment process. This contaminated water came from a service reservoir whose condition allowed the ingress of water containing *Cryptosporidium*.

The charge was brought by the Drinking Water Inspectorate under Section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended).

In response, Marcus Rink, Chief Inspector of Drinking Water said ‘

‘This prosecution was brought about because the company failed to follow nationally recognised and published good practice in assessing the risks of returning stored water to critical stages within the treatment works and to take appropriate and rapid action to protect consumers when the contamination was known’.

Notes to editors:-

The Drinking Water Inspectorate checks that water companies in England and Wales supply drinking water that does not put consumers at risk, and that is wholesome and acceptable.

It is a criminal offence for a water company to supply water that is unfit for human consumption. The Inspectorate investigates all drinking water quality events in England and Wales and will bring prosecutions if it believes that it has reliable evidence that an offence was committed, where the company does not have a defence that it took all reasonable steps and exercised all due diligence, and when such a prosecution is regarded as being in the public interest.

Summary of Franklaw event involving the detection of *Cryptosporidium* in drinking water supplied by Franklaw water treatment works

On 6 August 2015, 712,000 consumers resident in North Lancashire were advised by their water company, United Utilities, to boil their tap water before using it for drinking and cooking. This was in response to the detection of a protozoan parasite, *Cryptosporidium*, in water supplied from Franklaw treatment works near Garstang, which was the sole source of supply to the affected consumers. The area covered by this advice included Blackpool, Preston and the Fylde coast.

The event developed into a major water supply emergency. The advice to boil water to inactivate the parasite was in place for up to a month for some consumers, and caused significant concern to the consumers and businesses affected.

The most likely cause was direct contamination of treated water stored in Barnacre service reservoir – one of the major reservoirs in the Franklaw system. Contamination occurred through structural defects in the service reservoir that allowed ingress of faecally contaminated water. Immediately before the first positive *Cryptosporidium* result on 4 August 2015, the company had used the contaminated water from Barnacre reservoir within the treatment process at Franklaw.

Species of *Cryptosporidium* known to cause illness in humans were found in the supply system. In response to the continuing risk to consumers, the Drinking Water Inspectorate intervened with a legal Notice requiring United Utilities to take immediate action to make water safe, including the installation of ultra violet disinfection at most of the service reservoirs in Franklaw's distribution system which would ensure that *Cryptosporidium* present in the system would be rendered harmless. This was a major task for the company, involving significant financial outlay with procurement and engineering challenges, and the work was completed in less than four weeks. As this work progressed, and contaminated water was removed from the network, the boil advice was lifted in phases, until 6 September when it was lifted for all consumers. The company has since installed permanent ultra violet disinfection at Franklaw works.

The Inspectorate's investigation found that the incident arose following a number of significant failings in good practice including inadequate risk assessment of major operational changes made by United Utilities that took place at Franklaw works. The Inspectorate used its powers of enforcement to require the company to implement appropriate remedial actions at Franklaw works and at other water supply sites operated by the company, within the area of supply.

Public Health England has reported that there were no identified cases of Cryptosporidiosis illness in the community that could have been related to the water supplied during this event.

**Drinking Water Inspectorate
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