

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Albany County - New York

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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David VanLuven
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Commissioner of Public Works

Public Notification About Your Drinking Water – Total THM Exceedances

June 24, 2024

Dear Bethlehem Water Customer,

This notice is to advise our customers that our water system is in noncompliance with the drinking water standard for Total Trihalomethanes (THMs). THMs are disinfectant byproducts that occur at differing levels in all water systems treated with chlorine. The Town has issued similar notices in the past for Total THM violations. Although this is *not an emergency*, we want you to know what has happened, what you can do, and what we are doing to correct the situation.

In accordance with state and federal protocols, we are required to monitor public drinking water supplies for more than 90 potential health risks. As part of this monitoring protocol, we test for Total THMs on a quarterly basis (every three months) at four sampling sites selected by the NYS Dept. of Health that are most likely to have violations and represent the full extent of our water system. The notification received on June 24, 2024 from samples collected during the first quarter of 2024 showed a Total THM violation at two of our four sites: McCormack Road (northern end of road with dead end water main) in Slingerlands and Wemple Road (near River Road) in Selkirk. The samples confirmed that the locational running average of samples collected during the last four quarters at the McCormack Road sample station were 86.3 parts per billion (ppb) and at the Wemple Road sample station were 82.4 parts per billion (ppb) for Total THMs (the Maximum Contaminant Level allowed is 80 ppb).

What does this mean?

This is not an emergency, nor does it pose an immediate risk. If it had been, you would have been notified immediately. The health risks of THMs occur over a lifetime of drinking the water, but it is important for people to know there are risks so they can understand the expensive investments we are making to eliminate them.

While the EPA, NYS Dept. of Health, and Albany County Health Dept. have all declared Bethlehem's water safe to drink for now, the Town is working closely with these agencies on improvements to ensure our water is safe to drink over our lifetimes.

Trihalomethanes are a group of chemicals that are formed in drinking water during disinfection when chlorine reacts with naturally occurring organic material (e.g., decomposing vegetation such as tree leaves, algae or other aquatic plants) in surface water sources such as rivers and lakes. They are disinfection byproducts and include the individual chemicals chloroform, bromoform, bromodichloromethane, and chlorodibromomethane. The amount of trihalomethanes formed in drinking water during disinfection can change from day to day, depending on the temperature, the amount of organic material in the water, the amount of chlorine added, and a variety of other factors.

Disinfection of drinking water by chlorination is beneficial to public health. Drinking water is disinfected by public water suppliers to kill bacteria and viruses that could cause serious illnesses, and chlorine is the most commonly used disinfectant in New York State. All public water systems that use chlorine as a disinfectant contain trihalomethanes to some degree.

Some studies suggest that people who drank water containing trihalomethanes for long periods of time (e.g., 20 to 30 years) have an increased risk of certain health effects. These include an increased risk for cancer and for low birth weights, miscarriages and birth defects. The methods used by these studies could not rule out the role of other factors that could have resulted in the observed increased risks. In addition, other similar studies do not show an increased risk for these health effects. Therefore, the evidence from these studies is not strong enough to conclude that trihalomethanes were a major factor contributing to the observed increased risks for these health effects. Studies of laboratory animals show that some trihalomethanes can cause cancer and adverse reproductive and developmental effects, but at exposures much higher than exposures that could result through normal use of the water. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the information from the human and animal studies and concluded that while there is no causal link between disinfection byproducts (including trihalomethanes) and human health effects, the balance of the information warranted stronger regulations that limit the amount of trihalomethanes in drinking water, while still allowing for adequate disinfection. The risks for adverse health effects from trihalomethanes in drinking water are small compared to the risks for illness from drinking inadequately disinfected water.

You can get more information on health effects and precautions in our FAQs & Answers about Total THM Exceedances on the Town website (www.TownOfBethlehem.org) and the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hot Line at 1-800-426-4791.

What happened and what is Bethlehem doing about the situation?

THMs are byproducts of chlorine disinfection that form when chlorine combines with naturally organic matter in water. The levels of Total THMs vary depending factors including the amount of chlorine used, amount of organic material in water sources, temperature, and seasons. Our challenge is to control Total THM levels while also maintaining appropriate levels of disinfectant in the water to avoid bacterial issues. The Town is currently under an Administrative Order from the federal EPA to correct this violation, and the following actions to resolve the problem have been completed or are underway:

- Installation of water process improvements at the New Salem Water Treatment Plant (completed in 2013);
- Construction of a new pre-treatment facility at the Clapper Road Water Treatment Plant (completed 2020)
- Installation of a flushing station on McCormack Road to reduce water age at the line's dead end (completed in May 2024);
- Installation of a new water line to connect existing lines on Wemple Road, thereby eliminating the dead end water main on Wemple Road (construction projected for Spring 2025);

If you have health questions about THMs in our drinking water, please contact:

Maxwell Ferris
Director of Environmental Health
Albany County Health Department
(518) 447-4620
Maxwell.Ferris@albanycountyny.gov

We are happy to answer any questions you may have about our water, water system, monitoring, and construction projects. Please contact:

Paul Penman, P.E.
Commissioner of Public Works
Town of Bethlehem
(518) 439-4955
ppenman@townofbethlehem.org

Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

Date distributed: June 24, 2024
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