

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Albany County - New York

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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Paul Penman
Commissioner of
Public Works

Fact Sheet on Bethlehem Water

December 10, 2024

Is our tap water safe to drink?

Yes, our tap water in Bethlehem is safe to drink.

Who is responsible for the safety of our water?

The safety of our residents and our drinking water is our highest priority. The Town of Bethlehem's Department of Public Works (DPW) manages water quality in close consultation with the New York State (NYS) Department of Health, the agency responsible for ensuring the safety of our drinking water in New York in cooperation with the Albany County Department of Health. In turn, the NYS Department of Health relies on regulatory authority and guidance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

What is currently causing a musty smell in our water?

This fall's unusual drought and warm temperatures created ideal growing conditions for algae in the Vly Creek Reservoir. Algal blooms can occur in any waterbodies, but current Town staff had never seen one in this reservoir.

What is an algal bloom?

Algae grows naturally in outdoor surface waterbodies, including in our reservoir. Under certain conditions, excessive algal growth can create blooms. Small blooms like the one we experienced in October can create musty smells in both untreated and treated water. Larger blooms dominated by blue green algae, one of several common types of algae, can create Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), which pose a risk to human health. The Albany County Department of Health confirmed that we did not have a Harmful Algal Bloom.

What did water samples tell us about the algal bloom?

On October 30th, a water sample from the Vly Creek Reservoir was sent to a local lab for an algal assessment, and blue green algae was not found. A second sample from October 30th was sent to an analytical laboratory for a more detailed analysis, and we received results in early December that indicated the presence of blue green algae. Fortunately, the bloom did not have the characteristics of a Harmful Algal Bloom. The Albany County Department of Health has confirmed that our treated water has been and continues to be safe to drink.

Should I boil my water?

No. Boiling water will not address the musty smell.

Should I filter my water?

While the tap water in Bethlehem is monitored 365 days a year and is safe to drink, point of use (e.g. Brita or others) or whole house filters may reduce the musty smell.

Who is experiencing a musty smell?

The musty smell has been present in some areas of town, especially but not limited to the hamlets of Slingerlands and Delmar, but not in others.

What is being done to address the algal bloom and musty smell?

- In the Vly Creek Reservoir, where the affected water comes from, we treated the water to stop current and future algal growth, in close consultation with county and state health officials.
- In the New Salem Water Treatment Plant, where we treat the water from this reservoir to make sure it's safe to drink, we began adding potassium permanganate, which helps reduce odors. We are installing a powdered-activated carbon system which is scheduled to be online this month. We also increased the chlorine treatment, as this is extremely effective at disinfecting the water and neutralizing contaminants. All of this is with close consultation and guidance from county and state health officials.
- Through the Town's water distribution system, we have cut back flows from the New Salem Water Treatment Plant and increased flows from the City of Albany's water into the system. We also are aggressively flushing water from our New Salem water tank and fire hydrants throughout town to push new water in and pull water that may have the musty smell out.

Why is it taking so long to get rid of the musty smell?

Bethlehem's water system is large, with over 220-miles of water mains and seven tanks which collectively hold ten million gallons of water.

What are you doing to ensure this doesn't happen again?

With earlier springs and warmer falls becoming more common in Bethlehem, we have changed the algae treatment schedule at the reservoir to be based on water temperatures rather than on fixed dates. We have also purchased technology so that we can undertake algal monitoring in-house rather than by an outside laboratory, which will allow for quicker responses at the plant if we detect changes in the reservoir water. Along with the carbon system we are installing this December, these steps should help ensure that this algal bloom and resulting musty smell do not happen again.

Where can I find the results of tests that have been done?

We have been working closely with the Albany County Dept of Health, NYS Dept of Health, and others to ensure our water is safe to drink. The following tests were undertaken beginning in late October; links to the results are provided below.

Who do I contact if I notice a musty smell or have questions?

If you notice an increase in the musty smell in your home, please call **518-439-4955 ext. 2014**, email at: DPWBilling@townofbethlehem.org or fill out a complaint online at: <https://www.townofbethlehem.org/forms.aspx?fid=101>

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Paul Penman, our Commissioner of Public Works, at ppenman@townofbethlehem.org, or Dan Bolke, our Deputy Commissioner of Public Works, at dbolke@townofbethlehem.org. **The phone number for both is 518-439-4955 option 4.** Residents may also contact Max Ferris, Director of the Division of Environmental Health at the Albany County Department of Health at Maxwell.Ferris@albanycountyny.gov or (518) 447-4620.

Test Results

[City of Albany's Water Testing Results 11-12-2024](#)

[Albany County DOH 12-6-2024 Taste and Odor Follow-Up](#)

[Albany County DOH 12-9-2024 Taste and Odor Follow-Up](#)

[Analytical Services Inc. \(ASI\)'s Report](#)

[Town Email County DOH 11-1-2024](#)

[Town Email Albany City 10-31-24](#)

[Community Service Institute \(CSI\)'s Report](#)