

DELIVER TO THE MAYOR OF FLINT

Background: This following excerpts from an NPR report in the middle of the Flint Water Crisis outlines what a family in Flint had to do to stay healthy. It directly involves the people of the city affected by the crisis, which could have been brought to the Mayor's attention. This human element to the FWC likely influenced decisions made by the local government.

This mom helped uncover what was really going on with Flint's water

Up until October, the Walters family lived in a yellow two-story home on the south side of Flint. A couple of red maple trees shade the tiny front yard.

Walters heads to the back of the house, in a small room off of the kitchen, where the family keeps its stockpile of bottled water.

"This is our water stash. Once a week we go and we fill 40 gallons of water, so we have water to drink with, to cook with, and to bathe Gavin and Garrett in," says Lee Anne Walters.

Walters won't let her kids drink any water from her faucet. She won't even let her four-year-old boys, Gavin and Garrett, bathe in anything but bottled water, so preparing for bath time is quite the chore.

Walters takes jugs of water she buys at the store, dumps them in large pots, and heats the water on her stove. Once it boils, she dumps the water in the bathtub. Then she adds three or four gallons of cool water to sort of get the bath at the right temperature.

Over several months, Walters says she's gotten pretty efficient at this routine. She's got bath prep down to about 45 minutes.

“And then in between, because we only do the bathing thing once a week now – because, one, it's expensive, and two, the expense of all this on top of the water bills? We do baby wipe baths in between,” says Walters.

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People in Flint started complaining about their tap water early in the summer of 2014 – not long after the city stopped pumping its drinking water from Detroit.

Instead, Flint started pumping it from the Flint River. Back then, Lee Anne Walters didn't think it was that big of a deal.

They had just bought their house. Someone had stripped all the plumbing from it, so they had to redo the house with new plumbing, and they installed a whole house filter.

Every drop of water that comes into her home goes through this filter.

But a few weeks after the city's switch to water from the Flint River, Walters noticed something was weird.

She had just set up the swimming pool in the side yard for the summer.

"Gavin started breaking out every time he'd get in the pool," says Walters.

The rash was bad enough that Walters took him to the doctor.

"And the doctors kept telling us it was contact dermatitis." She says they told her that "he's coming into contact with something that he's allergic to."

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The city of Flint learns about Walters' problem

Eight months after Flint started pumping its drinking water from the Flint River, Lee Anne Walters stopped letting her kids drink it – everyone from the four-year-old twins, Garrett and Gavin – to her teenagers, JD and Kaylie.

"We quit drinking the water in December, when my 14-year-old got sick and it started coming through our filter and out the kitchen sink brown," she says.



A sample of the water coming out of Lee Anne Walters' tap.

CREDIT LEE ANNE WALTERS

That was December 2014.

Walters says the water had this orangeish-brown tinge that would not go away, even when she put a fresh cartridge in the water filter, and at this point she was putting a fresh cartridge in the water filter at least a couple times a month.

Back when Flint was buying Detroit water, she only replaced it a couple times a year, so she called the city out to come take a look.

The city sent Mike Glasgow, Flint's Utilities Administrator. He's a Flint native and he's spent the bulk of his career working for the city.

"I remember this fairly well," says Glasgow. "A complaint had come through from her about discolored water – orange water."

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