



NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY
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City of Lockhart, GBRA explain discolored water

Water was bacteriologically and chemically safe at all times

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LOCKHART – For several days beginning Thursday, July 12, Lockhart citizens experienced discolored water when they turned on their taps. “We know this concerned and upset many people,” said Vance Rodgers, assistant city manager, operations, “and we want to take this opportunity to reassure everyone that the water was bacteriologically and chemically safe at all times. We also want explain what happened, how we responded, and the steps we are taking to minimize the chances of this occurring again.”

The source of Lockhart’s water supply is a series of six groundwater wells located east of the city. The water from these wells is high in iron and other minerals.

According to Rodgers, the Lockhart water treatment plant uses aeration to precipitate the iron from solution and uses filters to remove the iron from the final treated water. Unfortunately, the plant experienced a filter break-through on July 12 that allowed iron to pass through the filters and into the distribution system. The precipitated iron causes the water to appear anywhere from a light straw color to a pinkish-red.

As soon as the discolored water was reported, city officials and personnel from the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA), which operates the treatment plant under contract with the city, took action to correct the situation.

“Plant personnel drained and flushed all of the necessary structures to remove the concentration of iron in the plant. They also began backwashing filters at an accelerated frequency in order to clear up the process, and individual filters were continually monitored for turbidity,” said John Smith, GBRA upper basin operations manager.

More-more-more

In addition, extra bacteriological test samples were taken on Friday to ensure that at no time was there a problem with the disinfection residual or safety of the finished water.

Once GBRA and Lockhart officials had stabilized the process, they began an investigation into the cause of the filter break-through. GBRA's preliminary results indicate an accumulation of iron in the raw water holding basin and the filter backwash decant basin. This gradual accumulation seems to be the origin of the problem.

"After carefully reviewing the preliminary results of this investigation, GBRA and the City developed short-term and long-term plans to address this situation," said Rodgers. "We are currently evaluating and repairing the backwash decant basin waste pumps and piping. We are also monitoring the turbidity of each filter's effluent more frequently, as well as iron in the raw water holding basin and the backwash decant basin. This will enable us to remove the solids and prevent its build-up."

Rodgers said they will also implement long-term steps including several items that are already budgeted for next year. These include the evaluation of chemical feed systems and operational procedures at the plant; installation of on-line turbidity meters on each filter; repair of filter valves that are not functioning as they should; replacing media in filters that have experienced loss over the years; and evaluating filter loading that puts water unevenly through the filters.

According to Rodgers, most user concerns involved the color of the water and the staining of white clothes. In most areas, the flushing of fire hydrants helped clear up the water. White and light clothing stained by the water can be cleaned with a washing additive called "Iron Out." Citizens that have retained clothes ruined by the stained water may submit claims to GBRA by contacting the Water Plant between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

"The water treatment plant has served the citizens of Lockhart faithfully for many years, said Rodgers. "However, even the best-built and operated systems need to be re-evaluated from time to time. We want to assure our citizens and customers that we will be working hard in partnership with GBRA to make sure the water treatment plant is able to serve the needs of this growing community for many years to come. We sincerely apologize for these water quality problems."