

# Flint residents must now pay for their water, but they can't drink it

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This January 26, 2016, file photo shows a sign over the Flint River in Flint, Michigan. Virginia Tech researchers who exposed the lead-tainted water problem in Flint said last August the city's water quality had improved, based on tests at more than 160 homes. But residents still can't drink the water. Photo by: AP Photo/Carlos Osorio

People who live in Flint, Michigan, are about to start paying the full cost of their water again. However, that water is still polluted with lead. Lead is a dangerous chemical. It is not yet safe to drink straight from the tap.

On Wednesday, state leaders will end a city relief program. It has helped people in Flint pay their water bills for more than two years. The program started in 2014, when the city's water system became polluted with lead. Since that disaster, the state has spent about \$41 million in credits to help cover local water bills. The credits cover more than half of each person's monthly bill.

Anna Heaton is a spokeswoman for Michigan Governor Rick Snyder. She said the credits are ending "because the city's water meets all federal water quality standards." These standards are listed in two national laws. The first is the Lead and Copper Rule, and the second is the Safe Drinking Water Act. Heaton said the state will continue to send water filters to Flint. The filters help remove some of the lead from the water. They will assure people that the water is safe to drink, Heaton said.

The news about the relief program is causing frustration in Flint. The city has some of the highest water bills in the country.

### **Three Years Without Safe Tap Water**

"They want to make it look like they've resolved this thing," said Tim Monahan. After the water problems began, he suffered a painful case of Legionnaires' disease. The sickness causes breathing problems and fever. "It's been three years, and we still can't drink the water," Monahan said.

Flint Mayor Karen Weaver has argued against ending the credits. She said the state should pay for the water until it is clean enough to drink "without a filter."

"This is a trust issue," Weaver said. She criticized state officials for giving short notice about the credits ending. She wanted them to continue through March and possibly longer.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has studied Flint's water system. Last month, it said the system met national standards. Lead levels were not much different from those in other cities, the department said.

### **Many People In Flint Rely On Bottled Water**

These results don't necessarily mean the water is safe. The city still advises people not to drink the water unless it has been filtered. Many people in Flint still refuse to use it for cooking or bathing. They rely instead on bottled water.

The end of the city relief program will likely make problems worse. Of the 99,000 people who live in Flint, about 40,000 are poor. Many will have trouble paying their new water bills on time. As a result, they won't qualify to have their old water pipes fixed. Many of these aging pipes contain a significant amount of lead.

For many years, Flint paid to have water piped in from Lake Huron. Chemicals were added to the water to keep out lead from metal pipes. That changed in 2014 when the city came under the control of a new emergency manager. Officials switched to Flint River water to save money.

### **Huge Mistake Caused Major Health Problems**

The officials made a big mistake. They failed to make sure that chemicals were still added to the water to keep out lead. That mistake allowed rust, iron and lead to leach from aging pipes into the water. These pollutants then ended up in people's homes. The disaster exposed thousands of children to high levels of lead, which can cause many health problems. Lead can affect intelligence. It can also cause problems with speech, learning and behavior. More than a dozen officials have been charged with crimes for their part in the water crisis.

Nearly three years later, many people still don't trust the water. Government officials are trusted even less.

## Quiz

- 1 Which detail from the section "Huge Mistake Caused Major Health Problems" BEST explains HOW officials contributed to Flint's water problems?
- (A) They failed to make sure that chemicals were still added to the water to keep out lead.
  - (B) Lead can affect intelligence. It can also cause problems with speech, learning and behavior.
  - (C) More than a dozen officials have been charged with crimes for their part in the water crisis.
  - (D) Government officials are trusted even less.

- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Three Years Without Safe Tap Water."

*The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has studied Flint's water system. Last month, it said the system met national standards. Lead levels were not much different from those in other cities, the department said.*

Based on this paragraph, which of the following is TRUE?

- (A) The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality promised to make Flint's water completely free of lead.
  - (B) Flint's water is totally clean, because its water system meets the national standards for lead levels.
  - (C) Water systems in other cities besides Flint also contain certain amounts of lead in the water.
  - (D) Flint's water system contains the most polluted water of any water system in the United States.
- 3 What do Michigan state leaders and the people of Flint DISAGREE about in the article?
- (A) whether water filters should be sent to Flint to remove some of the lead from the water
  - (B) whether the government should continue the relief program that helped pay for water
  - (C) whether Flint's water supply should come from Lake Huron or Flint River
  - (D) whether water with lead in it will cause serious health problems for adults and children

- 4 Which of the following statements would Flint Mayor Karen Weaver MOST LIKELY agree with?
- (A) Water should be supplied for free to everyone in Michigan.
  - (B) National officials should change the Lead and Copper Rule.
  - (C) Water filters should be given to everyone in Flint for a low price.
  - (D) People should not have to filter the water that they pay for.