

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

Craig A. Stough 8/14/2014

"Sylvania Water Report"

The weekend of August 2nd and 3rd was traumatic for Sylvania and all of the surrounding areas receiving water from the City of Toledo water treatment plant. Microcystin algae toxin was found in Toledo water samples and a "no consumption" advisory was issued by the Ohio EPA to all users. But what really happened and when? Was our water safe? What should be changed as we move forward?

The City of Sylvania receives all of its water from the City of Toledo via a water main heading north on Holland-Sylvania Road to Sylvania's pumping station at Main Street and Brint Road. From there, the water is pumped up into the City of Sylvania's two water towers. Toledo has successfully delivered all the safe water Sylvania has needed since the 1970's.

On Friday night, August 1st, and early Saturday morning, August 2nd, however, the City of Toledo identified possible algae toxins in its water tests. Sylvania, along with Maumee and other separate distribution systems, were ordered to close their water intake valves from Toledo about 6:00 a.m. to limit the spread of the possible contamination. The Lucas County system serving Sylvania and Springfield Township could not be isolated because of the many connection points. Toledo water already in our water towers continued to be used for flushing toilets, irrigation, etc., and the valve to Toledo water had to be reopened midday Sunday as the water towers began to empty.

Upon hearing of the water crisis, residents all over the Toledo service area, including Sylvania, quickly emptied store shelves of bottled water. Fortunately, our stores quickly replenished their supplies and plenty of water was available for sale. Springfield High School served as the free water distribution point for all of western Lucas County. Thank you to all the individuals, organizations and businesses that offered free water to our residents.

Water was pumped from Olander Lake, purified by the Ohio National Guard and distributed at Springfield High School and elsewhere. Homebound Sylvania and senior residents were delivered water by our police and fire departments and by the Red Cross. Sylvania Southview High School was planned for free water distribution later Monday if the water advisory had not ended.

Water purity tests were taken Saturday morning by Toledo at the Sylvania pumping station. The Ohio EPA drinking ban was in effect for all water from Toledo because it was unknown if the toxin had reached Sylvania and other municipal water systems.

When the test results were finally received Monday afternoon, hours after the ‘no consumption’ advisory had been lifted Monday morning, the results showed the algae toxin never reached the City of Sylvania and had not contaminated our water system. Toledo later reported contamination was only found in north Toledo.

The August 2nd and 3rd water crisis showed how dependent we all are on the Toledo water treatment plant, and will lead to new procedures, better communication and system improvements needed for the future safety of our residents and businesses.

Moving forward, the City of Sylvania needs confirmation that Toledo can professionally manage the water plant and avoid a repeat water crisis in the future. The lack of timely communication from Toledo unnecessarily strained our residents and hurt our businesses. Toledo has successfully treated algae blooms in the past, but failed this time while the City of Oregon’s water treatment plant had no problems.

I believe it is time to again consider the possible regionalization of the existing Toledo water plant. A regional water authority would be created and sell bonds to pay Toledo the fair value of the treatment plant. Improvements would be made to the plant, a second intake/treatment system added, the operation non-politicized, and water rates equalized for all customers.

Regionalization has been studied on and off for the last 15 years. Together with TMACOG and former Toledo Mayor Mike Bell, this option was most recently studied over the last four years, but rejected by current Toledo Mayor Mike Collins. Toledo City Council, however, is now considering studying a regional water authority.

Short of that regionalization, I believe Sylvania needs to re-examine its plan for a separate Lake Erie water intake and treatment plant. We purchased the necessary right-of-way and were close to constructing our own system in the late 1990’s while Toledo was demanding a third of our income tax receipts just for the right to purchase Toledo water. In 2004, we negotiated a 20 year water purchase agreement without that requirement, but the escalating cost of Toledo water, and the threat of continued safety concerns necessitates we restudy and consider our own water intake and treatment system once again.