



DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

United Utilities fined for drinking water offences

At a sentencing hearing today in Bolton Crown Court, United Utilities was fined a total of £200,000 and additional costs of £54,000 were agreed.

On 30 January 2018, United Utilities pleaded guilty to supplying inadequately disinfected water from the Sweetloves water treatment works in Bolton on two occasions.

The charges were brought by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and in response, Marcus Rink, Chief Inspector of Drinking Water said

'These were serious failures by the company to maintain control of water treatment processes, and which have been duly recognised by the court. The Inspectorate will continue to require the company to meet the drinking water quality standards in place to protect consumers.'

Notes to Editors

Fines were £50,000 in respect of charges relating to the first event and £150,000 in respect of charges relating to the second event.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate checks that water companies in England and Wales supply drinking water that does not put consumers at risk and that is wholesome and acceptable to consumers.

It is a criminal offence to supply water that is not adequately disinfected. The Drinking Water Inspectorate investigates all drinking water quality events in England and Wales and will bring prosecutions if it believes that it has reliable evidence that an offence was committed, where the company does not have a defence that it took all reasonable steps to avoid the offence and exercised all due diligence, and when such a prosecution is regarded as being in the public interest.

Summary of the events

The charges relate to two events between 31 March – 3 April 2015 and 19 July – 22 July 2015. Sweetloves Water Treatment Works is located approximately 3 miles to the North of Bolton. At the time of both events, the works was supplying a total population of just under 80,000 people. The area affected was North and East of Bolton approximately round from Middlebook to Egerton and North and West of the A58.

The events arose due to the failures of sample pumps serving monitoring equipment critical for controlling the treatment process.

There were no cases of ill health linked to these events however the time taken to restore the water treatment process at Sweetloves to an acceptable standard following the second event did have an impact on consumers normally supplied by the works.

The offences committed by the Company were, in part, attributable to the absence of procedures to prevent the continued supply of water in cases where there was a failure in preliminary treatment or disinfection at Sweetloves.

There was a failure by the Company to properly implement its own procedures with regards the implementation of, and response to, alarms at critical control points in the water treatment process at Sweetloves.

The striking similarity of the initial phase of the event in July to the event in April demonstrates that the company failed to take adequate steps and learn appropriate lessons from the April event.

The July 2015 event resulted in a significant impact on consumers in the Bolton Area. Nearly 18,000 properties were without water for nearly a day on 20 July and then had to boil all water destined for drinking or food preparation until the afternoon of 23 July.