



guardians of drinking water quality

DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

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*****Press Release*****

Northumbrian Water Ltd fined for drinking water offences

At Peterlee Magistrate's Court today, Northumbrian Water Ltd was fined £499,725 and costs of £32,792.65 were agreed out of court. A victim's surcharge of £170 was applied.

The offences arose in December 2016 when water with a taste and odour was supplied from South Moor Service Reservoir, located in Burnhope, Durham which serves 10,000 consumers in County Durham. The event followed maintenance work on the reservoir that required the internal application and curing of an epoxy coating material. The curing period was not as required in the instructions for use and, when the reservoir was returned to supply, caused taste and odour issues for consumers. Consumers described the water as tasting like medicine, plastic, chemical or metallic.

Northumbrian Water Ltd pleaded guilty to the supply of water unfit for human consumption and for an offence arising from not following the manufacturer's instruction for use of a product. The Inspectorate was critical of the lack of supervision and control of those carrying out the work and the lack of adequate checks on water quality prior to returning the reservoir to service.

The charges were brought by the Drinking Water Inspectorate under Section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended) and Regulation 33(3)(b).

In response, Marcus Rink, Chief Inspector of Drinking Water said :-

'This was an event that should not have happened. Corners were cut in carrying out the work and inadequate scrutiny did not identify this. Consumers experienced water with an unpleasant taste and odour which is likely to have been detected had adequate checks been carried out before the reservoir was put back into service. This prosecution acts as a reminder to companies of their ultimate responsibility for drinking water quality at all times. We are content that the Court has recognised the seriousness of this event'.

Notes to editors :-

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.

It is a criminal offence for a water company to supply water that is unfit for human consumption. The 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 and exercised all due diligence (in the case of Section 70 offences), and when such a prosecution is regarded as being in the public interest.

The Service Reservoir concerned supplied 10,000 consumers.

The charges brought were :-

1. Northumbrian Water Limited did, between 15 December 2016 and 20 December 2016, use its water supply system to supply water to consumers in properties served by the South Moor Service Reservoir, situated near to Green Lane, Burnhope, Durham that was unfit for human consumption contrary to Section 70(1) of the Water Industry Act 1991.

2. Northumbrian Water Limited did, between 15 December 2016 and 18 December 2016, apply a product to water (that was to be supplied for such domestic purposes as consist in or include, cooking, drinking, food preparation or washing, or for food production purposes) at South Moor Service Reservoir, situated near to Green Lane, Burnhope, Durham in contravention of Regulation 31(1) of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 that being an offence by virtue of Regulation 33(3)(a) of the said Regulations.

Inspection of the reservoir identified the need to apply an internal coating and the product chosen was an epoxy coating which required a period of 'curing' the duration of which was dependant on the prevailing ambient temperatures and humidity. This was recognised in the fact that dehumidifiers and heaters were deployed to assist the curing process but the deployment of this equipment was cut short due to financial considerations. The reservoir was returned to service and the inadequately cured coating caused tastes and odours in the water supplied to consumers.

**Drinking Water Inspectorate
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