



PRIVATE WATER SUPPLIES – CASE STUDY 2013/14

Land agents – a sectorial group in need of water safety information?

In October, after power was restored to a public supply booster station, an operational sample was collected by the water company from a farmhouse and found to contain *E.coli*. On investigation the company identified that the contamination was likely to be arising in two privately owned tanks providing water to the farmhouse and three other properties. Boil water advice was given to the occupiers of all four properties who were also provided with a bowser and bottled water. It was found that the metered mains supply filled an underground break pressure tank. Water from this tank was then pumped to another storage tank and from there water fed by gravity to the farmhouse, the other three properties and six cattle troughs.

After seeking advice from the Inspectorate, the water company and local authority sought to clarify whether the water supply arrangements were within the scope of the private supply regulations. The land agent was uncooperative, but it was eventually established that all the properties were situated on one premises, therefore, this was not a Regulation 8 private supply, but instead it was a public supply, albeit the arrangements were unusual with only one property, the farmhouse, registered as a water company customer. Since the local authority was unable to serve a private water supply Notice to secure improvements, they instead used powers under the Housing Act to remind the land agent of his responsibilities and expedite action to secure a wholesome water supply.

Figure 22: Situation of tank



Figure 23: Interior of tank



Figures 22 and 23 illustrate the poor condition of the underground tank. A temporary overland supply was put in place comprising a new temporary water storage tank feeding the existing



booster pumps and bypassing both existing tanks. The water company verified that this temporary arrangement was compliant with fittings regulations. The water company and local authority then established a co-regulation arrangement for managing the ongoing risk. This involved the local authority assessing the supply as a 'temporary supply' against the Code of Practice for Provision and Management of Temporary Water supplies and Distribution Networks (BS 8551:2011) with the water company sampling four times a year alongside checks and, if necessary, enforcement of the fittings regulations. This co-regulation arrangement was considered necessary because information had come to light demonstrating how the land agent had ignored previous advice from consultants in 2012 about the need to improve the water supply arrangements. The temporary supply and co-regulation arrangements will remain in place until a permanent supply is provided that is demonstrably compliant with the fittings regulations.

This case study serves as a salutary reminder of the low priority afforded by some in society towards their responsibilities in relation to making sure that water supplies are safe. It further highlights the importance of local authorities and water companies sharing local intelligence to target areas at high risk of unusual water supply arrangements, thereby making appropriate risk-based adaptations to monitoring, inspection and enforcement. *The Inspectorate recommends that water companies and local authorities jointly develop educational materials targeted specifically at land agents, for example, a WRAS sector leaflet that local authorities can distribute.*

