

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Knew About Michigan Water Contamination for Months Without Telling The Public

By [Andrew Follett](#)

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The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) top Midwest official knew about the Flint, Michigan drinking water crisis of 2015 months before telling the public, [according to a Tuesday report by the The Detroit News](#).

EPA official Susan Hedman did not publicize the EPA's concern over Flint's water quality or the water's dangerous health concerns. The federal agency instead quietly fought with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for at least six months about what should be done.



Anthony Fordham picks up water at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan to deliver to a school after elevated levels of lead were found in the city's water in Flint, Michigan December 16 2015 REUTERS/Rebecca Cook

EPA water expert, Miguel Del Toral, identified potential contamination problems with Flint's drinking water last February and confirmed the suspicions in April. He authored an internal memo about the problem in June, [according to documents obtained by Virginia Tech](#).

Meanwhile, Hedman became aware of the contamination issue in April. She sought legal advice, but didn't receive the guidance until November 2014. The American Civil Liberties Union accused Hedman in October of attempting to keep Miguel Del Toral's memo in-house, [downplaying its significance](#).

The corrosive nature of Flint's drinking water is causing lead from pipes and pathogens to

get into the town's water supply, [according to a study by Virginia Tech](#). Flint [is currently dealing with an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease](#), a dangerous infection that usually spreads through a tainted water source.

Nearly two years ago, the state of Michigan decided to save money by switching [Flint's water supply from Lake Huron](#) to a local river. The state of Michigan, however, [applied the wrong standards](#) for governing drinking water, resulting in a system that did not properly control corrosion. Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder [activated the National Guard Tuesday](#) to help distribute bottled water and filters to the 100,000 residents of Flint.

A class-action lawsuit against Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality [alleges that the state wasn't treating](#) Flint's water with an anti-corrosive agent, a violation of federal law.

"At that point, you do not just have smoke, you have a three-alarm fire and should respond immediately," Marc Edwards, a Virginia Tech researcher whose analysis helped uncover the lead contamination, [told The Detroit News](#). "There was no sense of urgency at any of the relevant agencies, with the obvious exception of Miguel Del Toral, and he was silenced and discredited."

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