

City in Crisis

It seems there has not been a day since the start of 2016 that a new development or revelation on the Flint, Mich., water crisis has not been reported in the news. At this point, it is likely that the mere mention of Flint will forever evoke associations with lead contamination, sick children and government ineptitude.

As I write this letter, the Michigan government is scrambling to provide water to Flint residents and determine how it will replace the lead pipe in its distribution system. On Feb. 16, the state announced an agreement with engineering firm Rowe Professional Services Co. to "help identify and assess the condition of high-risk lead pipe in an effort to restore the city's safe drinking water supply," according to the Detroit Free Press. Meanwhile, the city remains in a state of emergency, with residents relying on bottled water.

In the wake of the crisis, companies and organizations have been mobilizing to help the residents of Flint—and to provide information and resources to educate Americans and prevent such a disaster from occurring in another U.S. city.

Donations of bottled water have poured in from International Bottled Water Assn. member companies—according to a press release, Absopure, Culligan of Flint, Maumee Valley Bottlers, Nestle Waters North America and Niagara had donated the equivalent of 1.5 million bottles by the beginning of February. At that time, Nestle, Walmart, Coca-Cola and Pepsi also announced an initiative to provide 6.5 million bottles of water for Flint public school students. Other companies large and small, in the water industry and other markets, also are donating, with some encouraging customers to



donate water at their retail locations. Many organizations have found other ways to actively help Flint residents. At the end of January, Plumbing Manufacturers Intl. members installed donated faucets and state-provided filters in Flint homes. According to a report on MLive.com, the 300 plumbers came from across the country.

When it comes to helping the public understand lead contamination, the water industry is leading the way. The Water Quality Assn., as well as companies like Fresh Water Systems, have answered frequently asked questions and released informational videos to provide education on lead and water.

Other organizations are working to help assuage homeowner concerns: Nonprofit organization Healthy Babies Bright Futures has partnered with Virginia Tech to provide in-home water testing kits. Residents will be able to take samples at their homes, send them to Virginia Tech's laboratory, and receive a report about any contamination issues in their water.

The crisis has brought many water treatment and distribution issues to light for the general public, not least of which are the problems brought on by aging infrastructure and decades-old lead pipe. The public, governments and the water industry must work together to help the people of Flint through this crisis and make every effort possible to ensure that everyone in the U.S. has access to safe drinking water.

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