



Media release

Wednesday, 29 August

Darfield water quality issues investigated

The Selwyn District Council is investigating a water systems failure which is probably the cause of a recent spate of gastroenteritis in Darfield.

Chief Executive Paul Davey says the Council is very concerned that residents in the area were sick.

"We apologise to anyone who has become ill resulting from a breakdown in our systems. You can rest assured we will find out what happened and address those issues," Mr Davey says.

"The Selwyn District Council is very mindful of its responsibilities around water quality and we are working on our Public Health Risk Management and Asset Management Plans – we have to take reasonable and practicable steps to meet the requirements of these. We are constantly looking at ways to ensure and improve water quality in the 30 water supply schemes covering our 6600km² district," he says.

Council is viewing this failure very seriously and is undertaking both internal and external peer reviews of the incident to understand how it happened and prevent future events.

Council is actively working with the Darfield water subcommittee and has a number of improvement works being progressed. These include drilling of additional well(s), reservoir storage and enhanced water quality monitoring.

The issue occurred when Darfield's deep well water supply had a pump failure. While this pump was being repaired, the Darfield water was coming from the Waimakariri River which is a chlorine-treated supply.

On Thursday, 16 August unacceptable levels of E.coli were recorded in Darfield's Waimakariri River water supply, shown in test results returned to the Council the following day. A Boil Water Notice was issued until three days of clear sampling were obtained – the usual process. This is a stage of the process that is not able to be sped up because of the time it takes to sample and process tests.

The test results and resulting boil water notice were communicated within an hour of their arrival at the Selwyn District Council via the media, Council website, directly to schools, rest homes, medical centre, hospital, community board members, township committee representatives and district councillors.

The Community Response Team were sent the notice at the same time, as it is their role to circulate the information by phone and text to ensure all residents in a community find out as soon as possible. The team was also asked to tell local retailers, particularly food premises.

“A letter was posted to all Darfield residents, but we rely heavily on these other word-of-mouth communication methods and this is one of the reasons Community Response Team have been set up,” Mr Davey says.

Despite the many levels of communication, Council understands some residents did not hear about the notice in a timely fashion.

“We are looking at alternative methods to get the message out as quickly as possible and to all residents,” he says.

The boil water notice was lifted on 21 August.

The Darfield deep well water supply was reactivated (22 August midday) and the Waimakariri River supply was turned off.

Council would like to thank those in the community who were so accommodating in helping inform their neighbours about the Boil Water Notice.

If you have any questions on Darfield water quality please contact the Council Assets Department Ph 347 2800.

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For more information, contact Selwyn District Council Chief Executive Paul Davey, 347 2805.