

Fairfax Water



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April 4, 2007

Dear Valued Customer,

As General Manager of Fairfax Water, I feel it is important to address concerns regarding elevated ammonia levels on March 26 in the tap water at some locations in northern Fairfax County. As the drinking-water source for more than 1.3 million people in Northern Virginia, we at Fairfax Water are deeply aware of and committed to our responsibility to provide reliable high-quality water.

If you were affected, let me say first that I understand how alarmed you must have been to suddenly smell ammonia in your water. Fortunately, the levels were far below those considered dangerous but, as we all know, ammonia is instantly and unpleasantly perceptible at even low concentrations. If you did not smell ammonia, your service was unaffected.

I deeply regret that this incident occurred and pledge that Fairfax Water will do everything possible to prevent a recurrence. I believe you deserve an explanation of what happened, how we responded, and what corrective actions are being taken.

Late on the afternoon of March 26, the Potomac treatment facility was shut down in order to conduct planned maintenance. When the plant was restarted, the chemical feed system responsible for adding precise amounts of ammonia to the water had apparently overfed the chemical. The ammonia addition is the final step in the treatment process as the water is pumped into the distribution system. Regrettably, some water with elevated ammonia left the treatment plant. Our online monitoring equipment signaled a problem and treatment-plant operators took immediate action to correct the situation. Additional personnel were called in at once to begin flushing the distribution system. Laboratory personnel were dispatched immediately to collect samples to determine the exact amount of ammonia in the water that left the plant.

A statement regarding the nature and severity of the problem was released to the press as soon as Fairfax Water verified sufficient information to make an accurate report to the public. A written message was posted on our web site and a recorded message was put on our customer-service telephone lines. Unfortunately, given the late-afternoon/dinnertime timing of the event and its diagnosis, as well as the many demands for the media's attention at the 6 o'clock news hour, the message was not disseminated via television and radio until later in the evening, not nearly as quickly as we would have

liked. We were fortunate to have the help of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department's "Reverse 911" system, which was used to make some of the direct-call notifications. We are examining all options for providing more direct and effective communications to our customers.

Due to the immediate and coordinated response of operations and field staff, the water with elevated levels of ammonia was contained within a relatively small area in northern Fairfax County. Flushing crews and laboratory staff were dispatched throughout the night on Monday and on through Tuesday evening to respond to affected customers.

I have conducted a post-incident review to identify the root cause of the incident. My staff and I have discussed response efforts and determined action steps to prevent a recurrence. I have also instructed my staff to continue to work with the media to help us convey the urgency of matters relating to drinking water.

As I stated earlier, I fully understand that this was an unacceptable situation. It certainly does not reflect the level of service Fairfax Water strives to provide. I offer you our sincerest apology for the anxiety, discomfort, or inconvenience this may have caused you and your family. Fairfax Water will continue to be vigilant in assessing our systems in order to prevent a recurrence of this nature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. M. Murray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Charles M. Murray
General Manager