

Kimberly Cecile Boensch

Dr. William Schulte

Multimedia Reporting of Public Issues 441-001

December 12th, 2023

Unsafe Drinking Water: An American Epidemic

Over 2 billion people worldwide don't have access to clean drinking water according to the CDC's data on water, sanitation, and hygiene. When you think of regions that lack access to clean drinking water you might immediately envision third-world countries, the truth is though, that many Americans also don't have access to clean drinking water. This safety concern could be closer to home than you think.

Many people assume that unsafe drinking water is a problem that mostly affects those who live in rural areas, but that's not the case. Unsafe drinking water can be found not only in rural areas but in metropolitan areas as well. Cities like Flint, Michigan, and Jackson, Mississippi are just two of many heavily populated cities in the United States that have tap water which individual citizens and health regulation organizations deem unsafe to drink.

Denmark, South Carolina, and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina are two cities that have a history of unsafe drinking water and are relatively close to home for Charlotte locals. Access (or lack thereof) to clean drinking water can be an issue for areas regardless of size or location. Three of the cities mentioned in this article are currently dealing with claims of unsafe drinking water while the other has previously dealt with unsafe drinking water and is now involved in a class action lawsuit as a result.

According to the United States Census Bureau, as of the year 2020, Jackson Mississippi has a population of 153,701 and Flint, Michigan is not too far behind with a population of

81,252. According to the United States Veterans' Affairs website, people who lived on base for more than 30 days from 1953 to 1987 may have been exposed to unsafe drinking water. In 1970, during the peak of this time when the water was unsafe at Camp Lejeune, the base housed around 34,549 people. Denmark, South Carolina has the smallest population out of all of the cities mentioned in this essay with only 3,538 people according to the 2010 census.

Citizens of Jackson, Mississippi have lacked access to reliable public water systems for decades according to a press release given by EPA administrator Michael Regan. The system has had multiple leaks resulting in extremely low water pressure and leaving citizens with little to no running water. Although Jackson's water system has had issues for much longer, just recently the issues reached a point at which many citizens are left without access to reliable, clean water.

In the case of Flint, Michigan's claims of unsafe drinking water, some citizens exposed to the alleged unsafe water were diagnosed with Legionnaires disease. The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, commonly known as the CDC, says that Legionnaires disease is a bacterial infection with symptoms similar to pneumonia that occurs when the body is exposed to water that has been contaminated with the bacteria legionella. Flint citizens diagnosed with the disease as well as their physicians surmise that they contracted the disease due to Flint's alleged unsafe drinking water.

Veterans who lived on base in Camp Lejeune between the years 1953 and 1987 and were exposed to the base's contaminated drinking water are plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit against the United States Government. The plaintiffs are seeking compensation for illnesses caused by exposure to the base's contaminated water supply.

Veterans who were exposed to the water have been diagnosed with a multitude of diseases including adult leukemia, cancers of the bladder, kidneys, and liver, multiple myeloma,

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's disease, aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes according to the United States Veterans Affairs webpage regarding the lawsuit.

Citizens of Denmark, South Carolina were exposed to a water supply that was contaminated with an antimicrobial called halohydrantoin, also known as HaloSan, from the years 2008 to 2019. HaloSan is not approved for use in drinking water according to a risk report conducted on the chemical in 2007.

HaloSan was shown to be an irritant to the skin and eyes, making the water in Denmark's public system not only unsafe to drink but also unsafe to bathe in. A 2019 article from the Post and Courier revealed that Denmark citizens filled 5-gallon jugs full of water at a nearby natural spring for household use because they were so concerned about the quality of the rust-colored water that came from their faucets at home.

Assuming that the cities mentioned in this article are the only cities in the United States that had claims of unsafe water would mean that a total of 273,040 people have been exposed to unsafe water. Unfortunately, that is not the case. These are far from the only cities in the US with claims of unsafe drinking water.

It is clear that being exposed to unsafe drinking water can cause various health problems. Unsafe drinking water poses a serious health risk to Americans everywhere. According to the United Nations fact sheet regarding global water sanitation and security, "more than two million Americans lack access to clean drinking water at home, and more than one million Americans don't have the plumbing required to flush a toilet." The fact sheet also states "Nearly a quarter of U.S. households on private wells have contaminants in their water, like arsenic or e. coli, that pose a risk to household and community health."

The good news however is that on March 22, World Water Day, the Biden administration designated more than \$49 billion towards ensuring equitable access to clean water and sanitation globally during a United Nations water conference regarding global water and sanitation goals to be met by the year 2030.

There is also an outlined plan on how the United Nations intends to reach this goal by working with the EPA to determine how climate change will impact the situation. The EPA and the United Nations have determined that the United States' water crisis is a direct result of climate change and poor governance.

Blog:

<https://www.blogger.com/blog/posts/2252304026225544229>

Interactive Map:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=142Sz9FIFj33H9KW81Gsu1xJG2s345R4&usp=s>

haring