

2017/46

Black particles, taste, odour & illness

1 September 2017

DWQR Inspector:  
Colette Robertson Kellie

## Basis of complaint

The Consumer expressed three separate concerns about his drinking water supply which he was concerned was causing him and his family to suffer illness. These included a bleach-like taste and stale smell to the water as well as the presence of black particles in his supply.

## Context of complaint

The Consumer contacted Scottish Water on a number of occasions during December 2016 and January 2017 to complain about the quality of his drinking water. He reported that his water supply had an unpleasant taste and odour and was causing illness. The Consumer also expressed concern about the presence of black particles in his water supply. The complaint was investigated by Scottish Water who took water samples from the Consumer's property and a neighbouring property. The water samples were analysed and found to be compliant with regulatory parameters. Scottish Water reassured the Consumer that his water was safe to drink and although he was possibly experiencing some variation in chlorine levels, these were safe and within the expected range for his supply.

From August 2017 Scottish Water received a significant number of taste and odour contacts due to the presence of geosmin, an algal breakdown product, in the reservoir supplying Carron Valley Water Treatment Works. Although not harmful to health, geosmin can produce unpleasant earthy tastes and odours. In August the Consumer again contacted Scottish Water to complain that his water supply had an unpleasant taste and odour and was still causing illness. He was subsequently provided with bottled water on a number of occasions upon request. Scottish Water sampled his supply and a neighbouring supply. All the water samples were found to comply with regulatory parameters. Scottish Water provided the Consumer with explanations of the sample results and assurances that nothing had been detected in his water that could cause illness and that his water was safe to use and drink. Scottish Water further explained to the Consumer that the taste and odour issues he was experiencing may have been due to the presence of geosmin but reassured him that this substance, while unpleasant tasting, is not harmful to health.

## DWQR Assessment of complaint and the actions taken

Bottled water was provided to the Consumer on the date of his initial complaint and the following day Scottish Water attended his address to take water samples. Scottish Water carried out sampling

and analysis of the Consumer's supply and those of neighbouring properties and informed him of the results.

On each occasion Scottish Water sampled the Consumer's supply, they provided assurances that the tests on the samples taken from his property had detected no substances or microorganisms present within his water supply that could be the cause of any illness. In addition, a Scottish Water Bylaws Compliance Officer carried out a bylaws inspection at the Consumer's property and highlighted to him a number of conditions present within his property which could pose a risk to the quality of his supply.

Following a significant number of taste and odour-related contacts received from consumers supplied by the Carron Valley Water Treatment Works, Scottish Water installed a temporary treatment process which effectively reduced geosmin in the supply to more acceptable levels. Scottish Water have submitted a report to DWQR on the incident at Carron Valley WTW and this is currently being assessed by DWQR.

Analysis of water samples taken from the Consumer's property and neighbouring properties, the storage tank which supplies the Consumer's property, and the wider supply zone showed there are significant fluctuations in chlorine levels which may account for the Consumer's taste issues with his drinking water. There is no regulatory standard for chlorine, but Scottish Water should operate its chlorine dosing systems to prioritise the microbiological safety of all consumers of the supply while minimising the risk of taste and odour issues for its customers.

## Recommendations

DWQR considers that Scottish Water has responded fully to the concerns of the Consumer and have taken all reasonable and necessary steps to investigate his water quality complaints. Scottish Water responded to the Consumer's complaints within appropriate timescales and in line with the requirements of their complaints procedure. DWQR is satisfied that Scottish Water's sampling and analysis of the Consumer's water supply and that of neighbouring properties was appropriate, and the results of the analysis of these samples demonstrate that the water is compliant with the Regulations and is safe to drink. Historical analytical data from Scottish Water supports this finding. DWQR therefore has no recommendations in relation to Scottish Water's handling of the Consumer's complaints.

However, the Consumer's complaint against Scottish Water is partially upheld in relation to the fluctuating levels of chlorine in his supply. DWQR recommends that Scottish Water staff monitor chlorine levels within the Consumer's supply and neighbouring supplies to ensure a more stable chlorine residual, and shall require them to demonstrate that this is being done across the water network. In addition, DWQR recommends that the Consumer carries out the remedial work to his supply highlighted by the bylaws inspection carried out by Scottish Water at his property.

