



Drinking Water Quality Regulator
for Scotland

Consumer Complaint Determination

2013/49

Discoloration

7 July 2013

DWQR Inspector:
William Byers

Basis of complaint

Scottish Water has supplied discoloured mains water for a prolonged period of time requiring bottled water to be provided. Whilst Scottish Water claim to be replacing water mains, there are weekly issues with brown water which has caused clothing and a shower to be damaged resulting in no faith in the water supply.

Context of complaint

Mr G complained to Scottish Water in June 2012 after experiencing many instances of discoloured water at his home. Scottish Water investigated the circumstances and provided information to him regarding planned improvement works to the water mains within the water supply zone. He was also informed that a flushing programme had been set up for the mains in his street to remove the discoloured water.

DWQR Assessment of complaint and the actions taken

DWQR is disappointed to note that Mr G's written complaint to Scottish Water did not receive a written reply. Whilst Scottish Water responded quickly to his concerns and provided information and commitments to take water samples from his property and to set up a programme of flushing of the water mains, this was fulfilled in a telephone call and this is not fully aligned with complaint procedure best practice.

Scottish Water has subsequently responded to discoloured water supply complaints in the area by local flushing and has also carried out periodic flushing of the water mains but DWQR has found that neither the commitment to set up a formal, proactive flushing programme nor take a water sample have been met and this is unacceptable.

The information provided to Mr G in relation to the investment project to rehabilitate water mains in the zone was inaccurate. DWQR believes that there was inadequate understanding of the extent of the mains improvement works within the supply zone amongst staff which resulted in an unfounded expectation of supply improvement to the area in which he resided. Scottish Water has advised that they are aware of a number of areas where discoloration is an issue for consumers and that the current rehabilitation project will not address problems in all areas within the zone. There is further investigation work planned to fully define the appropriate mains rehabilitation required but it is likely to be a significant period of time before the resultant programme can be finalised and comprehensive improvement delivered.

Scottish Water staff have started a reappraisal of the interim actions they may be able to take to minimise water quality issues until such time as the necessary rehabilitation can be carried out.

Scottish Water has since contacted Mr G to re-examine the issues in his area and in light of the continuing water quality issues, has also arranged for the annual water charges to be refunded.

Recommendations

DWQR recommends that Scottish Water:

1. Review their complaints procedure to provide a written response to formal complaints.
2. Review the prominence given to bottled water requests in complaint type analysis to ensure full account of water quality issues can be made.
3. Ensures procedures are in place to confirm that advice regarding the benefits of investment projects is relevant to a consumer's address.
4. Ensures procedures are in place to verify that commitments given to consumers are carried out.
5. Re-examines the measures required in the water supply zone to ensure an acceptable quality of water is delivered to consumers pending completion of water mains rehabilitation projects and a permanent solution.
6. Issue a written apology to Mr G for the failings identified in relation to the handling of his complaint
7. Ensures Mr G is informed of the options being considered and of the chosen course of action.