

# Why Politicians Are Being Protected From Going To Jail In Flint Michigan Poisoning

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## Flint water crisis: governor's aides knew of issues within weeks, records suggest

Among 21,000 documents released by Michigan's governor one shows officials due to discuss Flint 'water issues' in June 2014, within weeks of supply switch



Governor Rick Snyder of Michigan has announced that he will testify before a US congressional panel about the Flint water crisis. Photograph: Ryan Garza/AP

[Ryan Felton](#) in Detroit

@ryanfelton13

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[Michigan](#) governor Rick Snyder's top aides were probably apprised of water quality issues in Flint just weeks after the city switched its water source, according to documents released on Friday.



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Flint's water supply was contaminated by lead, after the source of the city's drinking water was switched from Lake Huron to the Flint river in April 2014, while the city was operated by a Snyder-appointed emergency manager. Water from the Flint river had for months corroded lead from the inside of water pipes before flowing into thousands of households across the city. Residents began complaining about the water [almost immediately after the switch was made](#).

On 11 June 2014 Flint officials planned a conference call with Rich Baird and Harvey Hollins, two of the governor's aides who have since been deployed to aid in the response to Flint's water crisis. Plans for the call included discussion of "water issues", according to an agenda released in more than 21,000 pages of documents by Snyder's office on Friday.

The agenda also stated: "River processed water continues to meet all [Michigan department of environmental quality] standards."

The following day, an environmental official echoed the remark in an email to colleagues, saying: "the City has been meeting all applicable standards for water quality and treatment operations."

A spokeswoman for the governor did not respond to requests for information about the call, including the minutes, and could not confirm whether the two aides actually joined the call, nor what sparked the Flint river discussion.

"This is an agenda for a routine update meeting that was held on general topics in Flint and Harvey and/or Rich often participated," said spokeswoman Anna Heaton. "We can confirm they were invited to this 11 June call, but can't confirm whether they participated."

But the call is the earliest indication of when Snyder's office knew about concerns with Flint's water.

Snyder has been criticized over his administration's delayed response in addressing Flint's water quality issues, and the governor has also been hamstrung by questions over when he first became aware of the city's problems. Though Snyder has said he only learned about the extent of the water crisis last fall, the hoard of documents shows his office and state departments were clued into the unraveling situation nearly from the outset of the water source switch.

The governor – who also announced on Friday he would [testify before a US congressional panel](#) – said in a statement earlier about the massive document dump: "All levels of government failed the people of Flint. This crisis should never have happened, but we are making progress each day to meet the needs of residents."



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"By making this information easily accessible, everyone can review it and take what they need, and then we can all focus and work together on solutions, healing and moving Flint forward."

The documents featured more inflammatory remarks from officials, and a lack of urgency at the state and federal level to address water quality issues – similar to previous email disclosures – with environmental officials saying employees deserve a pay raise for [dealing with Flint residents' complaints](#), regulators [dismissing clear evidence](#) of the river being treated incorrectly, and Snyder's aides considered giving water filters to Flint residents as early as last March – about seven months before the governor conceded the situation in Flint was far worse than he initially understood.

In a 5 March 2015 email, the Michigan department of environmental quality's (MDEQ) spokesman wrote to Baird, Hollins, and Snyder's spokesperson, saying that the prospect of "making home water filters available" in Flint was discussed.

"If the idea begins to get legs, I'd suggest testing some models on the local water at the customer level to see if they work," wrote spokesman Brad Wurfel, who has since resigned.

Even though concerns were raised just days before about the potential of lead contamination to employees in his department, Wurfel continued: "[W]hile the state has provided residents in some communities with bottled water in the past, it always has to do with their water being somehow contaminated ... This would be the first time the state took steps to deal with what is an aesthetic issue on a system where the water is meeting state drinking water standards."

The following month, the Environmental Protection Agency employee who first raised concerns about possible lead contamination in Flint, Miguel Del Toral, was mentioned in an email chain involving several MDEQ employees. Del Toral had raised concerns about Flint not using corrosion control to prevent lead from leaching into the water supply.

In response to a question from Del Toral, Pat Cook of MDEQ sought guidance from colleagues in an 27 April 2015 email on how to respond. But there was little urgency from the state to answer Del Toral's concerns.

"Miguel is questioning that Flint is in compliance with optimal corrosion control," Cook wrote.

He added: "While it's not a big hurry at this time since Miguel is out till next week, we eventually will have to respond."