Waukesha to receive Lake Michigan water in mid-September

Residents can expect temporary changes in color, smell, taste

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WAUKESHA — The city of Waukesha is in the process of finalizing preparations for the transition from groundwater to Lake Michigan water. Right now, the switch is set to take place in mid-September. But before groundwater use ceases, Waukesha Water Utility General Manager Dan Duchniak notes that there are a few things Waukesha residents should be aware of.

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Changes to Waukesha Water

■ **Red/Discolored Water**
Why: Particles are stirred up during Waukesha Water Utility flushing
How long it will last: Less than one month

■ **Chlorine Smell**
Why: Higher levels of disinfectant are used during transition
How long it will last: Ab month

■ **Chlorine Taste**
Why: Higher levels of d tant are used during tr
How long it will last: Ab month

■ **Overall Taste Chan**
Why: Lower mineral co Lake Michigan water th groundwater
How long it will last: Pe

Water

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Once Great Lakes water starts flowing, there will likely be a chlorine smell and taste to the water coming from the tap. Duchniak notes that residents should not be alarmed as this is to be expected. WWU is switching to a chloramine disinfectant, which is a combination of chlorine and ammonia. In order to properly disinfect, the chlorine levels will be raised to about five times what residents are used to.

Despite the potential changes to smell and taste, the water is safe for humans to consume and bathe in. "It's used a lot in a number of systems throughout the country, and is approved by the EPA," Duchniak notes. "We are putting (disinfectant levels) that high during the transition because of the differences in chemicals and we want to ensure the safety of our customers as we work through the transition process."

After about a month, WWU will decrease the disinfectant levels. The chlorine smell and taste will subside at that time.

Moreover, residents might notice that their water temporarily takes on a red or discolored appearance. This is a result of large volumes of water — 50 million gallons, to be exact — being flushed through the system. This flushing can stir up particles along the walls of existing pipes. Again, Duchniak emphasizes that this is to be expected during the transition process. He recommends running cold water through the faucet until the discoloration subsides.

Should your water appear discolored, Duchniak advises refraining from doing laundry, as it could potentially tint clothing. If you do wash your clothing then and it takes on the color of the water, avoid drying it. Instead, he recommends picking up some Red-B-Gone or IronOut to undo the light crimson hue.

It is also recommended that residents with filters in their refrigerators or reverse osmosis systems remove the filters until the water returns to its normal, clear state in order to preserve them. "The issue is that it will shorten the life of those filters," Duchniak said. "You need to remove those filters until the water has transitioned over and until that red water clears up. Then you can put those filters back in and you can move forward with utilizing them."

Due to these temporary changes in water quality, Duchniak recommends that fish and reptile owners consult their local pet store in order to find out what the best practices are for keeping pets safe during the transition.

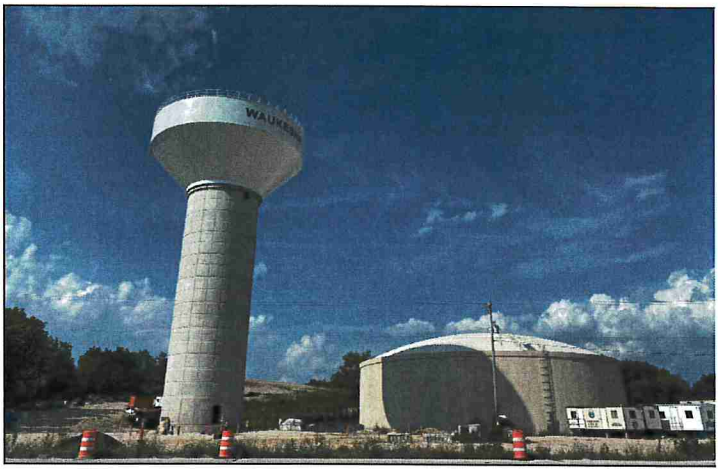
Moreover, due to the lower mineral content of the city's soon-to-be source, residents may notice a permanent change to the taste of their water. The difference should be subtle, and one's taste buds are likely to adapt over time.

Duchniak also reiterates that because Lake Michigan surface water is 60 percent softer than the city's current groundwater source, water softeners won't be necessary. But, ultimately, it will be a personal choice. "Most people that are on lake water do not have water softeners," he explained. "We would recommend bypassing your water softener and then deciding for yourself if you can live without your water softener or not."

If residents do decide to keep their water softeners, they need to be optimized. Lake Michigan surface water will require less salt than is used right now for softening groundwater. "If you want that soft water, you're going to have to have your water softener optimized by calling your water softener supplier," Duchniak said.

The switch to Lake Michigan water is beneficial for a variety of reasons. For one, the softer surface water will be easier on pipes and plumbing fixtures.

As Duchniak explains it, all water falls on a scale of hard to soft. Water that is too hard will form scales and cause buildup. Water that is too soft will be corrosive. The Lake Michigan water that Waukesha will receive strikes the perfect balance, or is in the "sweet spot" as Duchniak calls it.



Isabella Kostolni/Freeman Staff

As part of Waukesha's water project, a new water tower was installed near East Broadway and Les Paul Parkway on March 14.

Additionally, the switch to Lake Michigan water will put the city back in compliance with water quality standards. "The groundwater that we have right now exceeds the radium standard for water," Duchniak said. "We are under a court order to come into compliance with that standard."

The switch to Lake Michigan water is also the most cost-effective solution. The city and WWU weighed many options when seeking a solution to its current issues. Continuing to use groundwater would necessitate the use of a reverse osmosis system — which would cost a pretty penny.

Lastly, the use of surface water from Lake Michigan is the most environmentally friendly option. All of the water used by Waukesha will be treated and returned to its original source. No water will be lost along the way. "There would be no net impact on the Great Lakes," Duchniak said.

It's not likely, but in the event that the transition to Lake Michigan water goes awry, WWU has some contingency plans in place. The city's wells are being prepped to switch over to the chloramine disinfectant so, if anything happens during the switch, Waukesha can go right back to using its old water source while issues are resolved. "We are not removing our wells until we are completely switched over and we're confident we're done," Duchniak said. "We can always switch back to groundwater if we need to address any problems that we have."

Looking ahead, the city and WWU know that the switch to Lake Michigan water won't just benefit current Waukesha residents, but future residents as well. "We wanted to make sure when we implemented a solution for the residents of the city of Waukesha that we implemented a solution that would be there for the long term. For generations to come," said Duchniak.

More information about the upcoming switch to Lake Michigan water can be found at https://greatwateralliance.com/.