



The City of New York Manhattan Community Board 8

DEP Update on Discolored Water

Over the past month, parts of Manhattan and the Bronx have experienced instances of discolored water. This is related to the reactivation of the Croton water supply system. New York City is fortunate to have three surface water supply systems and the Department of Environmental Protection can switch among them to accommodate operational needs, including construction projects. Currently, DEP is supplying water from the Croton system for operational purposes, as work is being done to prepare for repairs on the Delaware Aqueduct.

It is normal that when the direction of water in the distribution system changes, sediment is disturbed and water runs brown for a period of time. This same discoloration occurs when standard repairs are made after a water main break.

Generally, periods of discolored water are short-lived, but earlier this week, DEP became aware of a concentration of complaints in Manhattan Community Board 6, after the system was initially activated in that area. This condition was brought to the Department's attention by Council Member Garodnick and corroborated by the number of calls made from Board 6 to 311. This is not consistent with what we would have expected based on the reactivation of the Croton system and it led DEP to look for another factor.

Field inspections indicated that differences in water pressure in the Croton system and the combined Delaware and Catskill systems might be causing a regulator that is normally in the closed position to open and close repeatedly, stirring sediment each time it moved. The City's water supply system is built to account for pressure fluctuations, using regulators to control water supply in response to demand, but this particular one would not have been expected to be active. DEP staff members have also discovered that several valves that would normally be open were in the closed position. We are in the process of correcting this, which should result in a noticeable decrease in incidents of discolored water.

DEP tests water regularly and those tests indicate that, although discolored, the water in the affected parts of Manhattan does not present a health risk. However, DEP recommends that if the water is brown, residents should run the tap until the water clears.

In addition to field testing drinking water on a daily basis DEP tracks and responds to 311 complaints, and conducts field surveys. As an additional precaution extra tests are being conducted in areas with high complaint volumes.

We expect to operate the Croton system for another several weeks and while this condition should not persist continuously, it may reoccur as neighborhoods return to the Catskill and Delaware water supply systems.

DEP will continue to monitor this closely and will keep information posted on its website.