

Wellington's drinking water fluoridation facilities are aging and in need of repair



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Source: Wellington Water

Wellington Water is working quickly to repair equipment that fluoridates the regional drinking water supply, which a recent review found has not been delivering fluoridated water to specification.

The Greater Wellington Regional Council Fluoride Facilities Review was commissioned by Wellington Water and received in February 2022 confirming Wellington Water's analysis of the failing performance of the decades-old fluoridation system.

Wellington Water operates the water treatment plants on behalf of Greater Wellington and delivers the bulk drinking water supply to Lower Hutt, Upper Hutt, Porirua and Wellington cities.

"Our fluoridation machinery is over 30 years old and no longer meets acceptable performance standards," says Greater Wellington Regional Council Chief Executive Nigel Corry. "The outcome of which is a low and inconsistent level of fluoridation in our water but it's also an opportunity to invest in an upgraded system.

"The review also identified some operational health and safety risks at the Te Marua and Gear Island Water Treatment plants. Because of this, Wellington Water made the decision last month to turn off the fluoride facilities at Te Marua and Gear Island Water Treatment plants while they work on reinstating service.

"This means that Upper Hutt, Porirua, Wellington City, Stokes Valley and Manor Park have not been receiving fluoridated water since last month, but we'll resume it as soon as we can."

Wellington Water's other fluoride facilities, based at the Waterloo and Wainuiomata water treatment plants, remain operating.

Wellington Water Director of Regulatory Services Charles Barker emphasised the duty of care water suppliers have to their customers.

"It is important that we supply safe and healthy drinking water to our communities.

"Greater Wellington Regional Council has tasked us, on behalf of the metropolitan Wellington councils, to operate and maintain our Water Treatment Plants.

"This includes adding fluoride to the water supply as recommended by many national and international health bodies, including the World Health Organisation.

"We are working on ways to return fluoride to the water supply at our Te Marua and Gear Island Water Treatment Plants. We are also working on ensuring that we are able to consistently fluoridate the drinking water at all our water treatment plants in a way that provides the expected health benefit.

"Our review has provided a number of recommendations, which we are working to implement, and Greater Wellington Regional Council has funded us to carry out this work as a priority," says Barker.

It is expected that it will take 6-9 months to repair the equipment at the Te Marua Water Treatment Plant. This will return fluoride to Upper Hutt, Porirua and Wellington City.

Wellington Water is still evaluating what is required at Gear Island Water Treatment Plant.

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