



**Town of Reading**  
**16 Lowell Street**  
**Reading, MA 01867-2685**

FAX: (781) 942-9071  
Email: [jwellman@ci.reading.ma.us](mailto:jwellman@ci.reading.ma.us)

Administrative Services Department  
(781) 942-6611

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
NOVEMBER 4, 2019

**CONTACT:**  
JAYNE WELLMAN  
781-942-6637 o  
978-726-3359 m

## **BOIL WATER ORDER LIFTED**

*Preliminary investigation indicates isolated incident*

(READING, MA – NOVEMBER 4, 2019) - Early this morning, based on sample results, MassDEP determined that the drinking water no longer poses a threat to public health and has lifted the boil order.

What happened:

On November 1<sup>st</sup> the Reading Water Division was notified by the MWRA that a single sample from our October 31<sup>st</sup> routine weekly sampling returned positive for presence of E. coli bacteria. The sample was collected from an employee hand sink in the back room of Cumberland Farms at 295 Salem Street. Testing takes 18-22 hours to complete before results are available.

Once the positive result was received on Friday, Town water staff immediately mobilized and followed MassDEP protocols by performing a secondary test at the original site, and at two adjacent sites, in order to determine if there was a false positive. That test also takes 18-22 hours to return results. Town Water staff also ensured that 295 Salem Street was isolated from the Town's water supply as a precautionary measure.

Simultaneously on Friday, contingency planning began across town departments and with our partners at MWRA, Mass DPH, and Mass DEP to respond in the case of a second positive test for E. coli. Bottled water was ordered and extra town staff were ordered in on Saturday as a precaution.

On Saturday morning November 2<sup>nd</sup>, an Emergency Operations Center was set up at the Police Department along with a water operation call center. As that EOC began its work, the MWRA confirmed a positive result for total coliform (a less aggressive bacteria) at only the initial location and MassDEP then followed their protocol and issued the boil water order for the entire town. It is important to note that the lowest detectable level of coliform was returned at 295 Salem Street and that both sites immediately adjacent tested clear from measurable bacteria.

The EOC shifted from contingency planning to action quickly. Alert notifications went out through multiple communications channels including CodeRED, Readingma.gov, social media, message boards around town, the School Department contact parent list, and partners throughout the community and state. The call center was staffed by Reading public safety Dispatchers and MWRA personnel (including the Executive Director) to take calls related to the boil water order. Crews from Police, Fire, DPW, Health, and Facilities were immediately deployed to restaurants, the frail and elderly, and schools and fields, to inform, offer guidance, and deliver water. Notices were hand delivered to 23 Wakefield residences receiving Reading water. All public water fountains (including all schools) were shut down. Additional police officers and dispatchers were called in to aid with service on Saturday. Two members of the Select Board offered helpful advice to the EOC from the community perspective.

Bottled water was received on Saturday and Sunday mornings for distribution, first to the schools for normal operation through Monday and for weekend activities on town fields, then to the public on Sunday morning. In total, more than 1,800 cases of bottled water were distributed over the weekend. All DPW crews were called in on Saturday and limited crews on Sunday to address notification and distribution.

While notifications were going out to the public and calls answered on Saturday, water division personnel were retesting the initial site along with all other routine town testing sites, and investigating possible causes. **Preliminary investigation revealed that it was an isolated, site-specific issue that did not extend into the town's water system.** Two rounds of sequential negative testing proved that the town's water system does not pose a health risk. It is important to note that the Town's water system was never compromised as the Cumberland Farms building is protected by cross-connection backflow prevention devices, which is routinely inspected by the Town. MassDEP regulations mandate that public water systems follow specific protocols for a boil order, including informing the public, subsequent testing, and investigation, until two consecutive rounds of testing show no trace of coliform bacteria over a 36-48-hour period.

Cumberland Farms has been entirely cooperative with the Town through this process, is working to replace/repair any defective plumbing and equipment and fully sanitize their operation. The Town of Reading, Building Division, is permitting and inspecting the plumbing upgrades. The incident remains under investigation and water and health officials are working with the business to secure safe water quality.

The Town appreciates the efforts of our local and state partners, particularly at the MWRA, MassDEP, and MassDPH for their support and guidance through this process.

The Town extends our thanks to our residents for their patience as we ensure the safety of their water system.

###