



American Association of Poison Control Centers

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Poison Centers Issue Safety Alert for Contaminated Water in West Virginia

ALEXANDRIA, VA – America’s poison centers are warning residents in the areas surrounding Charleston, W.V., about a hazardous chemical leak in to the water supply. According to Kanawha County Emergency Management Office, a chemical named 4-methylcyclohexane methanol that is used in coal washing and preparation leaked from a containment area into the Elk River, an intake area that serves 300,000 people in nine counties. West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin issued a State of Emergency for West Virginia American Water customers in Boone, Cabell, Clay, Jackson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Putnam and Roane counties. Just after 7 a.m. on Jan. 10, President Obama signed a West Virginia Emergency Declaration, which authorizes the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to coordinate all disaster relief efforts.

"I don't know if the water is not safe," American Water Co. President Jeff McIntyre said. "Until we get out and flush the actual system and do more testing, we can't say how long this will last at this time." McIntyre said the chemical is NOT lethal in its strongest form and according to a fact sheet from Fisher Scientific, the chemical is harmful if swallowed and causes eye and skin irritation and could be harmful if inhaled.

According to West Virginia Poison Center Director, Dr. Elizabeth Scharman, Pharm.D., DABAT, BCPS, FACCT, the W.V. Poison Center (WVPC) received its first call from the general public at 5:53 p.m. on Jan. 9. "We have brought in two epidemiologists from the W.V. Department of Health & Human Resources to assist with answering calls as well as activating four WVPC staff members who were off duty to assist. Shifts are running longer than 16 hours each," said Dr. Scharman. "As of 9 a.m. on Jan. 10, the WVPC has received 526 calls from individuals reporting concerns or symptoms, including from physicians calling about patients they are evaluating."

West Virginia American Water Spokesperson Laura Jordan said just after 5 a.m. on Jan. 10, the company does not have conclusive results yet from any water quality testing. Jordan said there is no way

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to treat water at this point, and the chemicals need to be eliminated through systematic flushing. As of 5:30 a.m. on Jan. 10, Jordan said the flushing process had not yet begun, and the water was still being tested and there is no timeline yet to estimate when the water will be safe.

Symptoms of 4-methylcyclohexane methanol include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Headaches (ranging in severity)
- Diarrhea
- Reddened skin
- Itching
- Rashes

A list of water filling or distribution centers can be [found here](#).

For more information, the media may contact Brett Schuster, AAPCC communications associate, at 703.894.1859 or schuster@aapcc.org.

About the American Association of Poison Control Centers:

The AAPCC supports the nation's 56 poison centers in their efforts to treat and prevent drug, consumer product, animal, environmental and food poisoning. Members staff the Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222 that provides free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year from toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians and poison information providers. In addition, the AAPCC maintains the only poison information and surveillance database in the United States, providing real-time monitoring of unusual poisoning patterns, chemical exposures and other emerging public health hazards. The AAPCC partners with federal agencies such as EPA, HRSA and the CDC, as well as private industry.

To learn more, visit www.aapcc.org, like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, or read our blog at aapcc.wordpress.com. To join your voice with other poison center supporters, register for the AAPCC advocacy network at www.capwiz.com/aapcc – click on “Action E-List.”