

Non Supply of Water to SE5, SE15 and SE22 between 12 – 17 September 2003

Background

- Approximately 982 food businesses potentially affected to some degree
- TW anticipated full repair by 12th Sept but due to complications and number of bursts, TW unable to provide timescale for repair
- 2 complaints were received from the public in relation to food premises still operating. The complaints concerned 5 premises
- The premises were contacted and water supply determined and advice on hygiene given
- 4 complaints were received in relation to health & safety. 2 were from employees and 2 from employers. Advice was given in all cases.
- Call Centre advised to put calls from public and businesses straight through to EH Officer for advice to be given
- Large food manufacturer contacted to determine their supply and how they were coping
- TW water provided key users with tankers eg Hygrade Foods, Dulwich Hospital (which also has a borehole water supply used for down services) and Kings College Hospital (Lambeth) received an alternative feed
- Full supply re-instated on 17 Sept
- No extra cases of food poisoning/infectious disease determined during and after this period

Findings

All Local Authorities in the UK have been contacted electronically and asked to share best practice in similar situations. There were only 3 responses received. Two of these requested that any information discovered is shared with them.

Due to the nature and minimal responses received, it is clear that there is no national 'plan' of response in such a situation as experienced by LBS in September.

The situation has been specifically raised with the Association of London Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM) with a view to exploring cross-border

arrangements in the event of a similar emergency. The association is currently exploring the environmental health role in contingency planning in general, but little thought, thus far, has been given specifically to water outages.

The September water outage was due to a set of exceptional circumstances that are unlikely to be repeated. There has not been any identified public health impact in relation to food safety (see attached) or health and safety in the areas affected. However, the incident has highlighted the need to look at how we would deal with extended water outages in the future and we will be working with ALEHM to discuss mutual aid arrangements.

The actions taken by EH at the time of the water outage e.g. checking on high risk premises, advising clients directly over the phone etc were sufficient at that time.

If there were any future similar incidents, the EH response would be contingent on the nature and scope of the incident.

