

## Montgomery Lifts Advisory on Water

*Test Results Show No Contamination From Ruptured Main*

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An advisory to boil drinking water that had covered large sections of Montgomery County was lifted last night after two rounds of tests found that a rupture in a four-foot water main did not result in contamination.

Tens of thousands of residents may again drink water and wash

dishes without first having to boil tap water. County health officials said about 900 restaurants and food-service facilities that earlier had been ordered not to sell food unless it was packaged before the rupture Sunday night would be allowed to reopen today.

Officials recommended that residents and businesses, especially those with faucets that have not been opened for several days, open their taps for five minutes

before consuming any water. Officials also suggested discarding ice from ice-making devices, along with the first three batches of new ice, before wiping down ice-maker parts with a mild bleach solution. More details are available at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov).

The water main rupture had caused what was believed to be among the most widespread dis-

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## Tests Results Show No Water Contamination

ruption to water service in Maryland in at least 20 years, officials said. After the first round of tests came back clean, health officials yesterday allowed restaurants to reopen under strict hand- and dish-washing guidelines, drawing on directives used in Florida after hurricanes. Montgomery health officials said no illnesses were reported.

State and local officials said they would seek to improve emergency water-use procedures, particularly after complaints that residents and businesses did not receive notice quickly or clearly enough.

"It would behoove us to think about how we might deal with this in the future because if it happened once, it's bound to happen again," said Alan Brench, chief of the food-processing division of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

County officials pledged to train more employees to operate the emergency notification system, Alert Montgomery, which was not used because the only two employees capable of operating the system were out of town and others were not trained.

County Council members said they would press county officials on the issue. "It's something that needs to be resolved quickly," said council member Phil Andrews (D-Gaithersburg-Rockville.)

Ulder J. Tillman, Montgomery's health officer, also said yesterday that she would examine ways that the Alert Montgomery system could be used to notify restaurants of public health alerts.

Despite the hardship on businesses, forcing restaurants to effectively close was a necessary precaution, Tillman said. "I felt I needed to protect the public's health, and that had to take precedence over economic impacts," she said.

The pipe burst about 9 p.m.



Bill Dunn, manager of Potomac Pizza in Gaithersburg, had to close the shop on orders from the county. The owner of the chain, Adam Greenberg, says despite a need for caution, restaurants were unfairly shut down.

Sunday in a wooded area near Muncaster Mill Road. By midday Monday, about 100 million gallons of treated drinking water had poured into a nearby creek.

The rupture cut service for many customers and reduced water pressure in central and northern Montgomery. Health officials worried that, without enough water pressure in the pipes, groundwater could seep into the system.

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, which operates water and sewer systems in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, plans to implement a computerized system that would send e-mails or text messages to customers affected by a water main break, agency spokesman Jim Neustadt said.

"There are definitely some things we can improve on, and we're definitely looking at those," he said.

Montgomery's public health hotline received more than 500 calls yesterday and more than 2,000 calls Tuesday, many from residents and restaurant owners who were confused about what to do, health officials said.

"There are still people wondering, 'Am I in the affected area or not?'" said Mary Anderson, a spokeswoman for the Montgomery Department of Health and Human Services.

In interviews this week, some restaurant operators said they did not know whether their water service was part of the potentially contaminated system. Others knew they were part of the system but opened their restaurants anyway. Others abided by the rules.

Adam Greenberg, an owner of the Potomac Pizza chain, said that he understood the county's caution but that officials went too far in closing restaurants, given that there were no reports of people becoming ill and no negative test results. He said restaurants had ways to boil water and operate cleanly. "Why shut everyone down?" Greenberg said.

Greenberg said county workers called his restaurants in Gaithersburg and Rockville about 11 a.m. Tuesday and told them to close for the day. Justin Marsden, a waiter who was scheduled to work a double shift, said that

closing the restaurant cost him about \$125 in after-tax wages and tips. He said he might have to dip into his small savings account to fund an upcoming vacation. "It definitely would have helped me," he said of the double shift.

Some County Council members said they were disappointed that representatives for Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) had not disclosed Alert Montgomery's failure during a briefing Tuesday.

"There ought to be more than two people who know how to do this," said council member George Leventhal (D-At Large). "Otherwise, your whole emergency response capability goes out the window."

Leggett said the county is taking steps to ensure that more people "are in the loop" and trained to send out the alerts.

"It was a temporary glitch," he said, noting that the system has worked "perfectly well in the past."

Staff writer Ann E. Marimow and staff researcher Julie Tate contributed to this report.