

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 230278)

RESOLUTION

Authorizing City Council to hold hearings to investigate Philadelphia's emergency management practices and the City's overall preparedness when facing credible threats to our drinking water

WHEREAS, Just after midnight on March 25, 2023, the Philadelphia Water Department received notice that 8,100 gallons of toxic chemicals had been dumped into Otter Creek, a tributary of the Delaware River; and

WHEREAS, The Delaware River serves as a vital natural resource that provides drinking water to approximately one million residents in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The toxic chemical spill posed a credible threat to the City's drinking water supply; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection notified the public on the afternoon of Saturday March 25, 2023; and

WHEREAS, The administration notified the public of its specific concerns at a Zoom news conference on the evening of March 25, 2023, and.

WHEREAS, The City then provided an update based on the data available on the morning of March 26, 2023 at 10:30 AM and a posted notice approximately one hour later; and

WHEREAS, The initial electronic posting from the administration advised that Philadelphians might want to consider switching to bottled water at 2:00 PM on March 26, 2023; and

WHEREAS, The administration's vague directive caused some panic purchasing of bottled water throughout the City as residents who were able rushed to grocery stores and other retailers; and

WHEREAS, Grocery stores and other retailers could not meet the demand, even in neighborhoods that were not impacted by the threat posed by the toxic spill; and

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WHEREAS, Philadelphians without ready access to bottled water were left with the possibility that their tap water may be considered contaminated within only a matter of hours and were provided with no alternatives to secure drinking water; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphians who speak a language other than English were reportedly left on their own to gather information; and

WHEREAS, Information in Spanish was reportedly delayed while other widely spoken languages were not represented in official communications from the administration during the first days of the threat; and

WHEREAS, The administration had not previously established a plan for the emergency distribution of water to our most vulnerable residents despite the Delaware River's long history of vulnerability to credible threats posed by industrial facilities; and

WHEREAS, The combined effect of the delayed notice, the unclear directive from the administration, and the failure to adequately inform residents who speak a language other than English, exacerbated confusion and panic in the City; and

WHEREAS, The City's response to the toxic chemical spill raises concerns over trust among residents in the City's drinking water supply; and

WHEREAS, A public hearing is necessary to investigate the administration's emergency management practices and the City's overall preparedness in the face of credible threats to our drinking water supply; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia residents must have confidence that the City's public officials are prepared to offer protection from environmental harm; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes City Council to hold hearings to investigate Philadelphia's emergency management practices and the City's overall preparedness when facing credible threats to our drinking water.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the thirteenth day of April, 2023.

Darrell L. Clarke
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Michael A. Decker
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Phillips

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Phillips, O'Neill, Vaughn, Brooks, Harrity,
Squilla, Gauthier, Bass, Thomas and Lozada