

ANATOMY OF A DISASTER

By Kevin Maine

At the time of writing, Jackson is six days into the crisis. A boil water order is in place and bottled water stations are located around the city.



What started the problems in Jackson, Mississippi? In 2020, freezing temperatures caused Jackson's water treatment facility to shut down. The district went without potable water for nearly six weeks. Ever since, the town's infrastructure has struggled to keep up. Like many facilities in New York, staffing shortages further complicate matters.

Once again trouble strikes. Jackson's O.B. Curtis treatment plant's main pumps were severely damaged forcing smaller backup pumps filling the void. Then the governor was warned Jackson would soon fail to produce running water.

Next – chemical treatment problem impacting the conventional treatment side of the plant. The chemical treatment issue was affecting particulate removal. Causing a side of the plant to be temporarily shut down and resulting in a loss of water distribution pressure.

On August 30th, torrential rainfall triggered massive flooding from the Pearl River washing over Jackson and propelled its already crippled drinking water treatment facility to fail. Affecting parts of Hinds County and Jackson Mississippi's drinking water treatment plant, affecting about 180,000 customers. Leaving those residents without potable water or adequate water pressure for firefighting and other essential services. A boil water notice and emergency declaration had been declared.



Mayor Lumumba made the following statement "I have said on multiple occasions that it's not a matter of if our system would fail but a matter of when our system will fail. This is a set of accumulated problems based on deferred maintenance that has not taken place over decades".

The mayor is aware of issues at the facility. However, it appears there is no corrective action plan addressing deficiencies. How many times have we heard similar statements "deferred maintenance", when recommending upgrades or repairs to our water and wastewater systems?

What can we learn from Jackson's problems? **HAVE A PLAN!** Review and revise your plan from time to time. Have critical spare equipment on hand (chemical metering pumps, pump repair kits, filters), and many items too numerous to list here.

New York Rural Water Association's water and wastewater technicians can help with SOP (Standard Operating Plans), ERPs (Emergency Response Plans) and developing a critical equipment inventory. A special thank you to the fine crew with Mississippi Rural Water Association who stepped in to assist, and while the problems are not resolved, they were able to restore water to the community!



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