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Aquifer water back on tap for public

Hutt Valley residents and others in the Wellington region with a taste for water drawn straight from the Waiwhetu Aquifer will soon be able to get their preferred drop from the Buick Street taps in Petone, Lower Hutt.

Lower Hutt Mayor Ray Wallace said he understood a solution had been developed for assuring safe water delivery at the Buick Street taps meaning they could be turned back on within the next week to 10 days.

“This is great news for Hutt Valley people,” Lower Hutt Mayor Ray Wallace said. “Providing water that’s safe to drink is a top priority for the Council, and I understand that this treatment option will do that - provide safe, healthy water without adding any chemicals or having any impact on taste.”

The Buick Street taps and those at Dowse Square in central Lower Hutt were turned off in April when water from the aquifer tested positive for E.coli for the third time in five months. In consultation with Regional Public Health and Greater Wellington Regional Council, Wellington Water began chlorinating the previously un-treated water delivered to the homes of more than 70,000 people in Lower Hutt.

Water from the public taps was unable to be treated, however, so was switched off. Now, Wellington Water is installing a small unit at Buick Street that will treat the source water before it comes out of the tap, meaning it is delivered safe to drink.

“I know there are a lot of people, and not just from the Hutt Valley, who want an unchlorinated option for their drinking water,” Mayor Wallace said. “It’s great to be able to turn this back on for them in a way that ensures the water is safe.”

The public tap is expected to re-open within the next 10 days, depending on the installation and testing processes. Details will be confirmed on the Hutt City Council website and Facebook page.

UV water treatment is widely used for both public and private drinking water supplies, says Wellington Water’s Group Manager of Network Strategy and Planning Mark Kinvig, and Regional Public Health support the addition of UV treatment to the Buick Street bore as a way of managing potential public health risk.

“At the flow-rate of water from the public taps, the UV unit provides effective barriers against contaminants such as giardia, cryptosporidium, campylobacter and E.coli, and will comply with the Drinking Water Standards of New Zealand,” Mr Kinvig said.

Wellington Water is also investigating a similar treatment option for the taps at Dowse Square. “We expect to be able to use the same treatment at the Dowse Square taps, and hope to have them operating before the end of June,” he said.

Following the earlier positive E.coli test results, and an unprecedented level of bacterial activity in the aquifer water, several investigations are in progress, including one into the main bores and associated equipment that provide water for Hutt Valley and Wellington. Once that investigation is complete, decisions will be made on long term options to ensure safe water can be reliably delivered through the public distribution network. In the meantime, chlorination of water in the public distribution network will continue.

Mr Kinvig said the investigation into the main bores would be completed later this month.

Mayor Wallace said he was pleased with the approach being taken, and the solution that allowed the popular Buick Street taps to reopen.

“Whatever the outcome of the investigations, I can assure people that public health will be the priority. Water is something that you just cannot take chances with.”

Facts

- UV light kills bacteria, and makes protozoa (microscopic organisms) unable to reproduce
- People drawing water from non-chlorinated sources need to ensure their storage containers are clean
- Chlorinated water is best for storing for emergency purposes – remember households should be storing enough for seven days
- The aquifer provides around 60 million to 70 million litres of water a day to people in the Hutt Valley and Wellington
- Average domestic water use per person is around 210-220 litres a day

[Read the background to the recent chlorination of Lower Hutt's water supply.](#)

ENDS

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