



TOWN OF STOUGHTON

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

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2025 Message to the Citizens of Stoughton

July 28, 2023

To the good people of Stoughton,

I began serving the Town of Stoughton on December 12, 2022. Roughly three months later, I published in the media and on the Town Manager's page of the Stoughton website a letter to the community introducing myself. Among the values I discussed in that letter, I noted my commitment to openness and transparency in Town government.

In this spirit, I am writing today to share with you, as fully as I can at this time, accurate information about an occurrence at one of our water treatment plants that has become the subject of rumor and speculation through social media and other conversations. You deserve factual information in all things, especially when it concerns public health and safety.

What happened?

At approximately 5:30 p.m. on November 29, 2022, someone entered Water Pumping Station 7 (also known as the Goddard Station) off Sumner Street. The chlorine pump at this site was shut off. The Town's water stations are remotely monitored and may be partially controlled through what is known as a SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system. While an alarm would ordinarily be sent out through the SCADA system to the main control panel at Water Department headquarters and to the on-call employee's cellular phone whenever chlorine levels fall below a predetermined set point, the alarm functions were also disabled on this occasion.

How was this discovered?

When employees arrive at Water Department headquarters each morning at 7 a.m., the first order of business is to check SCADA readings and to re-start any stations that may have shut down overnight due to reaching their tank capacity. The SCADA system showed that the chlorine pump had been off since 5:30 p.m. the previous evening. It is important to note, though, that flow from this station shut off automatically at 10 p.m. the previous evening, as the tank was at capacity.

What did the Town do?

The top priority on November 30th was to ensure that public health was not compromised. Two Water Department employees went immediately to Station 7. They found that the main pump was on, but that the chlorine option was turned off. The employees restarted the chlorine option and remained on site to verify that it was then functioning properly and chlorine levels were being restored. The Town's Water Superintendent arranged a conference call with the state DEP (Department of Environmental Protection), followed up with a call to the federal EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). These

agencies gave technical counsel on how to proceed to ensure continuing water quality. It was determined that water treatment remained in compliance throughout this time. Testing was undertaken and the results indicated that no additional remedial action was necessary.

Was this matter referred to law enforcement for investigation?

It seemed likely to the employees who responded to Station 7 on the morning of November 30 and to the Water Superintendent that this event had to have been caused by someone "on the inside." The entrance drive to Station 7 is blocked by a locked gate. A locked chain link fence surrounds the station building. The door to the building itself is reinforced metal and locked as well. There were no signs of forced entry of these physical barriers. Beyond this, only someone with access to and knowledge of the alarm and chlorine systems could have adjusted them in this manner. All Water Department employees involved in water treatment functions (as opposed to water distribution) had keys to this facility and all had the requisite knowledge. However, at a mandatory meeting for all such employees held on November 30th by the Water Superintendent, all employees denied accessing Station 7 after hours on November 29, 2022.

Considering all this, the Water Superintendent referred this matter to the Stoughton Police Department. The Police Department, in turn, advised the FBI of this incident, due to the potential domestic terrorism implications. Since the incident, the FBI and our Police Department have been investigating this matter to identify the responsible party and bring them to justice. This investigation remains active currently.

Was our water at risk at any time?

No. The Town responded in time to prevent chlorine levels from remaining low long enough to jeopardize the water quality. Despite the apparent intentional disabling of its alarm functions, the SCADA system did what it was designed to do. Notice of the low chlorine levels alerted employees at headquarters and facilitated an immediate response the next morning. As noted above, water quality testing confirmed that no additional remedial action was necessary. At no time was the water in the tank unchlorinated.

What about the employee allegedly responsible for this?

All Water Department employees initially denied accessing Station 7 at the time of the chlorine incident on November 29th. One employee recently changed his story and acknowledged that he adjusted the chlorine settings on November 29th. He was not on duty at the time, he was not on call at the time, he did not log his time or his activities at the station on that occasion, and he was not otherwise authorized to be there or take the actions he took. This employee has been placed on paid leave, as required under the circumstances, pending further investigation and action.

What is the Town doing to better protect us in the future?

The Town has undertaken a review of its practices and security measures in light of this occurrence. Without compromising our security measures, I can tell you that we are implementing system changes to enable us to have a more complete audit trail of those who access our water treatment and pumping facilities and log their actions in real time. We are also taking steps to better secure the alarm functions of the SCADA system from tampering.

What's next?

The investigation is proceeding and will be concluded as soon as possible, consistent with the interests of thoroughness and justice. That investigation rests in the capable hands of our local police and federal law enforcement authorities and I cannot comment further on that portion of this incident. As to matters in my bailiwick, what can be said is that my commitment to openness is ongoing. I will update you when there is more to share. In the meantime, please rest assured that the Town will continue to make your health and safety its highest priority.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Calter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Thomas J. Calter,
Town Manager