

# Madison Plans To Flush Pipes Of Manganese

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Concerns about the amount of manganese that has accumulated in the city's water mains have prompted the Madison Water Utility to embark on an ambitious project in March to clean all 820 miles of mains using a new and more powerful flushing technique.

"Madison's water system is showing its age," said David Denig-Chakroff, the utility's general manager. "And we need to look at new and better ways to deal with that."

Denig-Chakroff said the new technique is called unidirectional flushing.

Crews create more water velocity by opening hydrants in a way that directs water through specific pipes, he said. Because it is more labor intensive, the approach is more expensive and flushing the entire system will cost \$149,000 instead of the approximate \$66,000 that the spring flushing program usually costs.

Though the new technique proved effective at reducing manganese levels when used in several mains last fall, some residents with water problems worry that the utility is not focusing enough on the wells that are pumping the contaminant from the aquifer.

Manganese is a naturally occurring metal that, if ingested long enough at high levels, can damage the nervous system. It first surfaced as a problem nearly two years ago in homes in Nakoma, especially one in which black chunks of manganese turned up in ice cubes.

Water utility officials found the problem to be more widespread last fall when they used unidirectional flushing to cleanse a number of mains in the area served by well No. 10, the West Side well that serves most of Nakoma. The flushing revealed high levels of manganese in neighborhoods as far away as Whitney Way and Monroe Street.

City water officials have indicated that manganese levels are high in four wells.

Nakoma resident Lynn Williamson, whose water had extremely high manganese levels, has become very active on the issue and is a member of a task force that Mayor Dave Cieslewicz appointed to study the problem.

Williamson said she's pleased with the flushing plan but hopes the city looks more deeply into the problem.

"It's encouraging the city has acknowledged the widespread nature of the water problem," Williamson said. "But flushing alone does not guarantee water quality. The city needs to look closely at the problem citywide including the wells, reservoirs and aquifers."

[Return to story](#)