

Q&A – May 2019

Blue water in taps at Buchanan and St Ambrose High Schools and Townhead Community Centre

We wrote to you previously and said that we would provide you with a further update of the issue of 'blue water' at Buchanan and St Ambrose High Schools. Please find below some updated questions and answers:

What is the update regarding blue water at taps in the school?

Following reports from staff that there was blue water coming from taps at the school campus in Coatbridge, tests have been carried out at both schools, which indicated that there were higher levels of copper in the water in some areas of the schools. As all three properties are supplied from the one main water supply, with branched pipework supplying each location, tests were also carried out at the community centre but no evidence of blue water was present.

Although it can appear alarming due to the blue discoloration, this copper solution is caused due to corrosion in the pipework and has minimal impact on the quality of the water. Tests have also been carried out by Scottish Water which confirmed the main water supply to the building meets all drinking water standards.

We have now replaced all the internal copper pipework with plastic piping.

As the main water supply within the building is a copper pipe, we will replace it during the summer break as a precautionary measure.

Is there still blue water present in the areas where pipes have been replaced?

Samples have been taken from those areas and they confirm that the action taken has addressed the issue. Results from the water samples show that readings are within tolerance levels and drinking water meets the required standards.

Is a high level of copper harmful to people?

Copper is an essential nutrient but consumption of very high levels can cause stomach upsets.

Until all the legs of copper piping have been replaced, bottled water has been provided for all pupils and staff.

What are the results of the tests?

We routinely test water at all council facilities and water samples were taken in mid-October for microbiological analysis which were clear. Following concerns from staff, a chemical analysis of the water was undertaken by an independent body, which showed there was evidence of copper in water at both schools that were out with the

required tolerance levels. Following further sampling, there was evidence of inconsistency in the chemical analysis results which is why the decision was taken to replace all the copper piping within all three facilities.

What is the council currently doing?

As well as the ongoing replacement of the pipes, we have replaced filters, flushing the entire system daily and providing bottled water. We have engaged with unions and staff, and held meetings at both schools to update them on the progress we are making in tackling instances of 'blue water' at the St Ambrose/Buchanan High Schools campus in Coatbridge. Parents have also been provided with a Q&A, which is also available to community users.

I'm worried about recent press coverage about the schools and serious illness. What can the council tell me about this?

Press articles in the last few days have made a link between serious illnesses among some former and current staff (and one pupil) and either the water or the site on which the schools are built, although the articles did not make clear how exactly these illnesses have apparently been caused.

The campus is built on a site that, until the early 1970s, was used as a landfill. Landfill sites are commonly built on once the required work has been done to them. This work is called remediation. The council has a legal duty as the planning authority to ensure that the site is safe and, when planning permission was given, conditions were imposed which meant that a full site investigation and plan for remediation had to be submitted before work started.

Those planning conditions were met, with experts in this type of work carrying out the remediation and ensuring that the site was suitable for use before it was built on.

While any staff or pupil illness is concerning, there is no evidence to suggest a link between illness and the school site.

I have more questions. Who can I contact?

Please email lls.cce@northlan.gov.uk or telephone 01236 812606.