

# Flint, Michigan Water Crisis Timeline



with notations of key elements of: Heat, Fuel, & Oxygen

## Historical Context

- The Flint water crisis highlighted a longstanding issue in U.S. infrastructure that had been on the public's radar for decades: lead pipes. Outlawed in new construction in 1986, existing lead pipes remained in use. Despite reports and studies on their dangers, including Obama's 2011 Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act and a 2012 CDC study, the issue gained little traction until the Flint crisis created a compelling narrative in 2016, years after the problem began.

## 2011–2013: Financial emergency

- (Local) Mar 2011:** The Michigan state government declares Flint in a financial emergency amidst a \$25 million budget deficit.

## April 2014: Water source switch and water quality issues begin

- Apr 25, 2014:** Flint switches its water source from Lake Huron, which supplies Detroit, to the untapped Flint River to save money.
  - sharing images of discolored water on social media, raising initial awareness.
- (Local) Residents** begin complaining of foul-smelling, discolored water and
  - Local news outlets *Detroit Free Press* and *The Flint Journal* cover increasingly urgent resident complaints.

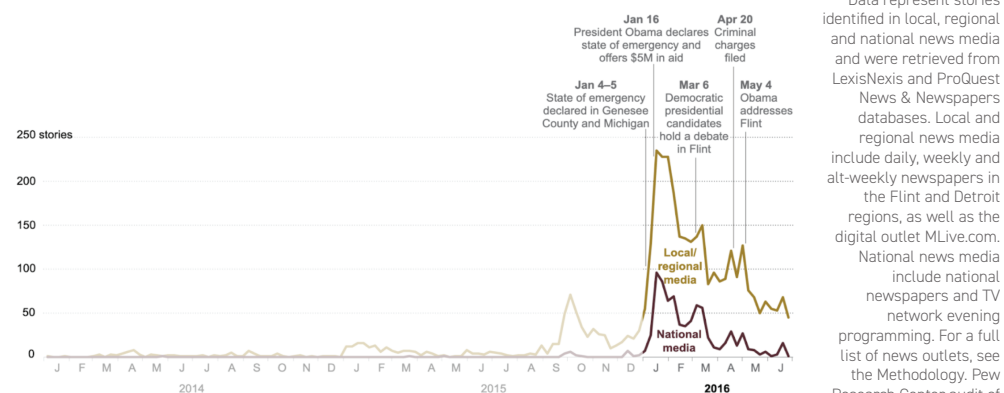
## August–October 2014: Water quality issues rise

- Aug 2014:** City-wide tests detect *E. coli* bacteria in Flint's water, prompting boil-water advisories. City responds by dumping large amounts of disinfectant into water.
  - using Flint water because the high chloride content (resulting from the disinfectant) is corroding engine parts.
- (Corporate) Oct 2014:** General Motors stops
  - Local news outlets (*Detroit Free Press*, *The Flint Journal*, WEYI) continue to cover citizen concerns and issues.

## January–July 2015: Water issues and concerns rise amid dismissive DEQ responses

- Sept 2015:** New concerns arise; lead contamination is confirmed by researchers, and local pediatrician finds elevated levels in children.
  - Sept 24, 2015:** Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a local Flint pediatrician who took the initiative to study lead levels before and after the water source change, confirms elevated blood lead levels in Flint's children in a press conference.
- Sept 15, 2015:** Virginia Tech Professor Marc Edwards holds a press conference, revealing that one in six homes in Flint has lead water levels exceeding the EPA's legal safety threshold, with higher lead levels concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods.
  - Celebrity Awareness:** Filmmaker Michael Moore, a Flint native, criticizes Michigan officials and begins speaking out about the crisis.

## Number of Flint water crisis-related stories identified in the local/regional and national news outlets



"Searching for News: The Flint Water Crisis" Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (April 27, 2017) <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2017/04/27/searching-for-news-the-flint-water-crisis>

## October–December 2015: Water source reverted, state of emergency declared, and social media outcries begin

- Press coverage remains mostly local, but some stories begin to be picked up in the national media; *The New York Times* prints its first stories about lead levels in Flint water in Oct 2015.
- Oct 8, 2015:** Governor Snyder announces that Flint will switch back to Detroit's water system on the 16th, but the water remains unsafe, as the pipes continue to leach lead because of the disinfectants previously used.
  - (Local) Dec 14, 2015:** Flint Mayor declares a state of emergency.

## 2016: Federal interventions, celebrity attention, and national media storm

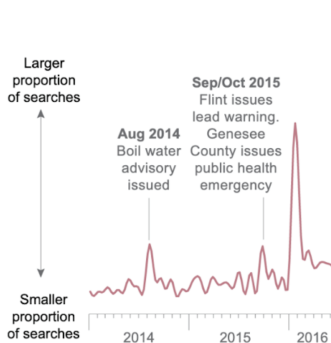
- Jan 5th, 2016:** Governor Snyder and the state of Michigan declare a state of emergency.
- Jan 16th, 2016:** President Obama declares a federal emergency, authorizing FEMA resources to provide clean water, filters, and other aid.
- Jan 2016: Media storm ignites.**
- Feb 28, 2016:** Star-studded #JusticeForFlint Benefit held in Flint.
- Mar 14, 2016:** Eight-year-old Flint resident Mari Copeny writes a letter to President Obama requesting a meeting to discuss Flint's water crisis.
- Mar 17, 2016:** Governor Snyder testifies before Congress.
- By March 2016,** 12 lawsuits had been filed in Michigan courts.
- May 4, 2016:** President Obama visits Flint and drinks filtered Flint water as a symbolic gesture, but residents remain skeptical of the water's safety.
- May 2016:** Celebrity reactions include statements from Eminem and Niki Minaj, to Madonna and Pearl Jam making donations.
- Jun 2016:** Legal charges ramp up.
- Nov 10, 2016:** Federal judge rules against the City of Flint.

## 2017–2025: Settlement, more community aid, and payments

- Mar 28, 2017:** A federal judge approves a settlement requiring Michigan to allocate \$97 million to replace water lines and offer free bottled water and filters.
- Aug 12, 2017:** Singer Bruno Mars donates \$1 million to aid Flint residents.
- Mar 2018 & 2019:** Celebrities like Jaden and Will Smith help fund bottled water and filtration systems for Flint schools.
- Nov 2021:** Federal judge approves \$626 million settlement, primarily benefiting children affected by lead poisoning.
- Mar 2023:** Settlement and restitution payments start being distributed to Flint residents.
- July 1, 2025:** Flint completes replacing nearly 11,000 lead pipes and restoring over 28,000 affected properties, completing the requirements of a court-ordered settlement.

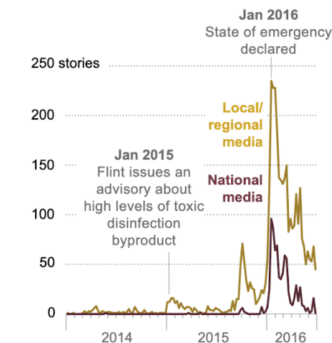
## Search activity

Proportion of all Google searches that contain Flint water crisis-related terms for the News and Media category within the Flint area



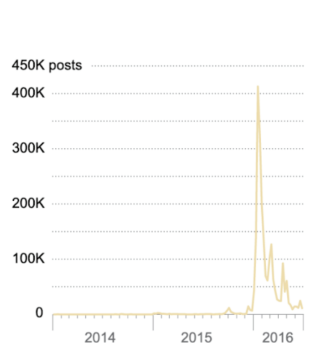
## Local and national media coverage

Number of Flint water crisis-related stories identified in the local/regional and national news outlets studied



## Twitter conversation

Total number of Twitter posts about the Flint water crisis across the U.S.



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