



August 3, 2017 at 4:30 p.m.

Statement to the press by: Niagara Falls Water Board Chairman Dan O'Callaghan

Good afternoon and welcome to the Niagara Falls Water Board. It's great that we have a free and independent press in this country that keeps citizens well informed. My name is Dan O'Callaghan and I am the board chair. I want to express my personal apology and that of the full board for the inconvenience and any alarm caused by the recent discharge of "inky black water" into the lower Niagara River.

Today, with board staff I will provide you with further details on the incident and describe the steps we are taking in carrying out an internal inquiry into all aspects of the matter. As for outside regulators at the DEC and EPA, of course we will fully cooperate as they look into the matter. We share their interest and determination to have a complete understanding of what happened on Saturday and to do everything possible to continue to protect public health and the environment. Now, it has to be said that there may be areas where we will not be able to comment due to various factors. We want more than anybody to clear the air but we are at a relatively early stage of the inquiry and have not yet drawn conclusions on every aspect under consideration. Similarly, there are matters that will be taken up with the regulatory bodies upon which it is too early to comment on.

We on the board have worked hard to make this organization better and are demonstrating that every month when we move forward on cost saving and efficiency initiatives proposed by our management team. We are committed to doing the best job possible for the ratepayers and water consumers of this city.

The management team I mentioned consists of Executive Director Rolfe Porter, Administrative Director Jim Perry, Finance Officer Kendra Walker and Superintendent of Operations Bob Drury. We have confidence in this team, both as regards the current matter and as we move forward in carrying out the Water Board's mission.

On behalf of our Board, I apologize for not holding a press conference before now but we had decided as a Board that our priority should be to investigate and identify the cause of the discharge of dark water in to the Lower Niagara River on Saturday, and to share preliminary results of our investigation with the DEC to fix the problem, rather than holding press conferences based on incomplete information.

We have now spent a good amount of time reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding the release and discussing the matter with the DEC and wanted to share this information with you.

The first thing you should know is that the discharge occurred during an upgrade of an important part of our wastewater treatment plant that will make our plant operate more efficiently and will result in cleaner water into the Niagara River.

As part of this upgrade, it was necessary for us to empty a sediment tank that contained "backwash water" that is created when the carbon filters, which clean the wastewater, are flushed. Like all carbon filtration systems, the carbon filters at the NFWB wastewater treatment plant need to be flushed periodically to keep the system



operating properly. That's how these systems work properly and remain maintained, and that's the way they were designed to operate.

Because they are carbon filters, the backwash is black. In this case, the backwash water was treated to remove solids and contained mostly carbon fines and some suspended solids that the treatment process did not remove. This is normal.

Typically, about once a year, the NFWB takes a certain quantity of this water – as it is allowed to do – and sends it through a disinfectant process before being combined with other treated water and then released into the lower Niagara River in accordance with our DEC permit. The NFWB has been doing this under DEC permits since the 1970s.

On Saturday, however, it has been clear to us that, as a result of possible human error and possible mechanical malfunction, a larger quantity of water from the sediment tank was released to the Lower Niagara than was supposed to happen. This resulted in the dark water in the Niagara River. We have been in discussions with the DEC about the details of what occurred and we are continuing these discussions in the coming days.

We are very confident that we have identified the causes of this unfortunate incident and know what needs to be done to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Our priority is clean water and properly treated wastewater. While we can't take questions or provide additional answers at the present time because of an ongoing investigation, I will commit to provide further periodic updates as things develop.