

Residents question water quality at complex

Work on water mains may affect Stadium Place

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When Stadium Place residents Lorenzo and Alice Fitch were admitted to Mercy Medical Center with undiagnosed illnesses Oct. 14, their daughters, Annette Goodwin and Maria Gresham, suspected their parents might have a cold or flu.

Now they're thinking maybe it was something in the water.

"We need some answers," Gresham said as she and her sister attended a meeting Oct. 16 at Stadium Place, where their parents moved to last year. Like many at the meeting, the sisters said they are especially concerned about the quality of the water at Stadium Place, largely because the city's Department of Public Works has turned the water off and on when fixing pipes.

"My mother always said the water smelled like a sewage system," Gresham told the Messenger. That concern was echoed by several residents at the meeting. They said water being turned off and back on by work crews coincided with water that smelled, tasted foul or made them sick.

"Sometimes that can be a problem," Dr. David Blythe, the state's chief epidemiologist, told the audience.

Lin Romano, deputy director of the Govans Ecumenical Development Corp., which built Stadium Place, told the Messenger a resident complained last year about water, but that there were no other complaints until Oct. 13, when a resident called the city's public works department.

Blythe and interim city health commissioner Olivia Farrow discounted the alleged water problems as being indicative of possible Legionnaires' disease. They said the Legionella bacteria has no smell.

But Farrow said at a press conference after the meeting, "I guess anything is possible at this point."

"I will definitely work with the public works department about this water supply," City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke told the audience at the meeting.

"We'll have to go through tracking documents to see if there's any complaints," Public Works spokesman Kurt Kocher said Oct. 20. But he said there's little the department can do because crews routinely fix the city's aging water mains, which requires turning water off and on.

As for Gresham and Goodwin, they're still in the dark. Their parents were released from Mercy late last week and tests showed no evidence of Legionnaires' disease. More tests are being done and results won't be known for 5-7 days.

Then, on Oct. 17, Goodwin said she and Gresham decided to take their father back to Mercy, because he was having the same symptoms as before.

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