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Update on Legionnaires' disease outbreak at Golden Hill

By ADAM BOSCH | Published: JANUARY 21, 2010 | 0 Comments

The Ulster County Legislature's health committee had a special meeting tonight to get an update on the Legionnaires' disease outbreak at Golden Hill. Health Director La Mar Hasbrouck, Deputy County Exec Marshall Beckman and Golden Hill Director Sheree Cross gave some new information.

Here are some of the highlights:

*** Legionella bacteria were found in 17 of the 32 water samples taken by the state Health Department, which were processed in a lab in Albany.

*** The source of the bacteria was found to be the home's hot water system.

*** Two solutions are generally implemented in these cases. 1) The water is chlorinated heavily to kill the bacteria. Or, 2) The water temperature is raised to a level where the bacteria cannot live. The weak water pipes at Golden Hill cannot handle the chlorination, however, so county officials are opting to begin hot-water flushes on Friday night.

*** Cross and Beckman said they're not sure if the hot water flushes will work. There are really combinations of three possible outcomes, which include:

- 1) The hot water flush could work, kill the bacteria, and they'll continue to do that quarterly.
- 2) The hot water flush could stress the water pipes so badly that they burst or leak.
- 3) The hot water flush could not be hot enough in some of the longer pipes, rendering it useless.

*** The county plans to test the water again after 10 days to see if the Legionella bacteria were killed.

*** The 271 elderly folks who live at the home are not allowed to shower, bathe or drink the water. That's likely to last until at least the beginning of February. They're being given bottled water and bathing kits in the interim.

One major question still needs to be answered: Where did the bacteria enter the water system? It's no secret that Ulster County has been warned at least five times since 2002 that Golden Hill's pipes are corroded, weak, leaking and in danger of "catastrophic failure." Thus far, lawmakers have avoided making a decision about renovating or



The Golden Hill nursing home in Kingston.

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- June 2009
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replacing Golden Hill. So far, they've only lauded the home's staff for handling this outbreak with speed and patience.

I wrote about the long-standing issue of bad pipes at Golden Hill last week. [Read the story by clicking here.](#)

Several legislators have told the Times Herald-Record they intend to re-introduce the issue of renovating or replacing Golden Hill in light of this outbreak, which has highlighted at least one of its weaknesses.


But in the interim, the county and state say it's a safe place to live. Just ask Beckman:

"My own mom resides there and I haven't had a concern about her at all," Beckman told legislators Thursday night.

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