

Recently, The New York Times reported that millions of Americans are drinking dirty water. The Times “compiled and analyzed millions of records from water systems and regulators around the nation as part of a series of articles about worsening pollution in American waters.” As Oakland County’s Water Resources Commissioner, I’m pleased to report that the drinking water from public systems operated by my staff is clean and safe. I can state that without reservation because I am familiar with Oakland County’s long history of managing both the water and the wastewater systems.

The problems normally associated with polluted water in other parts of the country typically occurred when waste or sewage was improperly disposed of or discharged into waterways. Shortcuts may have been taken and sewage could have been dumped into waterways or improperly treated wastewater could have been allowed to permeate the soil. These shortsighted approaches may have saved money in the short term, but today they are costing residents millions of dollars to fix.

The Oakland County Health Department and my office, along with state and federal regulators, have decades of experience aggressively enforcing clean water standards. That’s why we have clean, fresh water today. These efforts have often seemed costly, but I can say without equivocation that the expense has been worth it. Proper wastewater treatment and environmentally safe waste disposal have improved the quality of life in Oakland County.

A clean environment is important to all of us, but it is not free. Here in Oakland County we have willingly paid the price for clean water. We must be confident that every time we turn on the faucet, we can rest assured that we have made the right investment to ensure that our water is safe.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality’s (DEQ) recently released measures of success from its water bureau indicate that we are doing very well in Michigan in terms of providing drinking water that meets all applicable health-based standards. Nevertheless, I am a proponent of continuous improvement. Even in those areas that are rated “excellent” by the DEQ, it is imperative that we keep our eye on the ball. So far, we’ve done that.

John P. McCulloch