

Never Assume Anything

By Mike Stanzel, Source Water Specialist

I was recently contacted by a small Nebraska town that was experiencing coliform violations and also suspected they had a leak. They had recently just completed an Administrative Order for 6 months of chlorination due to coliform violations, and were concerned when recent samples came back positive.

The repeat samples taken at the well were negative so it was pretty safe to say that the problem probably was in their distribution system. The well pumps directly into the Stand Pipe with no taps in between, so we started there. The operator told me that a tank company had been out 11 months ago to clean and also install a new roof and a new vent cap and screen, as well. He showed me the paperwork to prove it. Although I did not doubt him, I was however concerned that the company that did this work was from out of state and one I had never heard of before in my 17 years of experience.

I asked him when the last time was that he overflowed his tank and he stated maybe a week prior to taking his routine sample. Fortunately his overflow pipe had a wire window type screen affixed to the end which we removed and much to his surprise it was full of dead flies. You could imagine the puzzled look on his face.

We cleaned the screen and I instructed him to turn the well on by hand and overflow the tower again to see what we would get. He stated that

this would take 90 min so I said, "Perfect, let's go see if you have a water leak, as well."

Well, being a small town and having kept good production records, it was apparent that they were losing approximately 20,000 gpd and it didn't take long to hear it. There was an abandoned school building which was still connected to a 2 inch line and the line had split during the winter months.

Now back to the Storage Tank! The tank was overflowing for an estimated 15 min., so we shut down the well and pulled the screen and found another handful of dead flies along with a few live ones. Yes, I know, GROSS. Now I was certain we had a problem on top of the tank. I instructed him to call the tank company right away and proceeded home.

Later that evening I received a phone call from the operator. They had the local well contractor climb up the tank to investigate and found that the vent cap and screen had been compromised most likely from faulty workmanship or being incorrectly installed.

So never assume just because something was supposedly repaired that it still can't be a problem.