3 Things Americans Need to Know About the Recent Wave of Cyber Attacks on U.S. Water Systems and Potential Health Risks

Drinking Water Quality Strategist Heather A. Kollar breaks down what's actually at risk.

Heather A. Kollar Nasdaq Green Tech Alumn

BRIDGEWATER, NJ, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Two municipal water utilities in New Jersey were hit by cyberattacks over the past week, part of a wider wave that has now struck water systems in at least a dozen states, the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness confirmed. In both New Jersey cases, hackers gained access to internet-exposed control systems - but staff shifted quickly to manual operations, and customers had uninterrupted access to safe drinking water throughout. No contamination has been confirmed in any state. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the FBI, and the EPA have issued emergency guidance in response.

"The cyberattacks reveal just how fragile water quality is," said Heather A. Kollar, Managing Partner of H2OCleanse and a Drinking Water Quality Strategist. "Hacking water treatment facilities could lead to another Flint-like crisis."

Here are three things Kollar says the public needs to understand.

1. Water treatment is chemical treatment - and that's exactly what's under attack

Water in 2026 is latent with chemicals - largely due to modern lifestyles and conveniences. Utilities dose it with chlorine or chloramine to kill bacteria and viruses, a pH adjuster (usually lye) to counter acidity, and corrosion control to keep lead and copper pipes from leaching into the supply. These processes run through programmable logic controllers (PLCs) - the same equipment CISA says was the entry point for the recent attacks.

The risk cuts both ways. In 2021, a hacker in Oldsmar, Florida briefly raised the lye level in that

city's water roughly 100-fold before an operator caught it. Too little of the right chemical is just as dangerous, and slower to catch: in Flint, Michigan, the city switched water sources without adjusting corrosion control, and lead leached into the supply for more than a year before the crisis became public.

"Flint wasn't hackers - it was negligence and a decision made without the right chemistry adjustment," Kollar said. "Now imagine that same imbalance triggered remotely, on purpose, at scale."

h2ocleanse ensures communities have clean, safe drinking wate

2. Bottled water isn't the safety net people think it is

When fear spikes, people reach for bottled water. Food & Water Watch's "Take Back the Tap" report found that roughly 64% of bottled water sold in the U.S. is sourced from the same municipal systems consumers are trying to avoid, often with minimal added treatment - and much of it sits in plastic that sheds microplastics, stripped of the minerals the body needs to actually hydrate.

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Bottled water has a real role as an emergency bridge, not a daily strategy. That distinction was clear in Jackson, Mississippi in 2022, when the city's treatment plant failed and more than 150,000 residents went weeks with no water from the tap at all - the scenario bottled water is actually built for.

3. This is a wake-up call to steward water proactively, not just react to emergency headlines

Water quality isn't fixed - it changes often because it moves. Just last month, the Hackettstown Municipal Utilities Authority in New Jersey issued a system-wide boil water advisory after E. coli was detected in a well, affecting five municipalities across two counties. Advisories like it happen dozens of times a year in ordinary towns.

"You don't get a countdown before your water quality changes," Kollar said. "You get a notice - or, in a cyber scenario, you might not get one until it's already a problem."

Kollar recommends highly certified filtration at the point-of-use. Solid carbon block filtration is the strongest fit for roughly 85% of U.S. communities, removing PFAS, microplastics, and pathogens while preserving minerals, with no water waste. The remaining communities - those with naturally occurring radioactive contaminants like uranium, or high nitrate levels, as seen in parts of Connecticut - are better served by reverse osmosis.

Kollar is a vocal advocate for making certified filtration standard in building code, citing aging infrastructure failure and the growing list of contaminants utilities now contend with, including PFAS, microplastics, and bacterial or viral contamination.

"We don't wait for a break-in to buy a lock," Kollar said. "The goal is to be protected before the crisis, not scrambling after it - because water is fragile, it's always moving, and every living thing depends on it."

Kollar leads Clean Water Champs, a community focused on water quality education and stewardship. "We are building a community of people who know it's time to steward our water better, because it is, in fact, life," Kollar said. More information is available at www.CleanWaterChampions.com.

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