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PDII Tech Issues and Solutions
WRR 9 Flint Water Crisis
1)
Technical and Non-Technical Issues

a)

Provide one example of what happened/how it happened/what led to the crisis (the technical aspects).

I believe the largest technical reason for the Flint Water Crisis is the lack of corrosion inhibitors in the water treatment process. These usually stop heavy metals from coming off the pipes and into the water, something very important for lead pipes in particular, which were common in Flint due to most of the area being developed before we realized the health risks of lead. The lack of these corrosion inhibitors led to high amounts of lead and other heavy metals entering the water. The amounts could range from just below the legal limit, to over a thousand times more. This of course led to many issues, as once ingested, lead stays in your body and causes constant harm, often taking the form of developmental issues for children, and causing long-term aggressive behavior.

b)

Provide one example of WHY it happened (non-technical).

Money. The main reason this happened was because of money. The area had taken a huge economic hit when manufacturing jobs were hot, but as those jobs left, the area was left in poverty. At the time, the unemployment rate in flint was over double the national average. Because there's no money, there's no taxes, and the city has no money. They had been running in a deficit for years. The state had taken over the operation of the city, and eventually decided they needed to stop the deficit spending. To cut costs, they wanted to stop using the expensive Detroit water they had been using for years, and when implementing their own system with an old plant, they cut every cost and every corner they could. This lead to the very necessary corrosion inhibitors being left out and no tests being done, eventually causing the entirety of the crisis.

2)

Was this a preventable crisis? If so, what could have been done differently to prevent this from happening?

Yes, extremely. They were using Detroit water for years, and all of this happened because they couldn't afford that safe water. If they had the money (or if water was state-run and free to cities), the change wouldn't have needed to happen in the first place. This could have also been

prevented in implementation, as all it would take were some corrosion inhibitors, a very common practice. It could have also been prevented upon completion and before being turned on if tests were run and they caught how bad the issue was early on. Lastly, it could have been mostly prevented if they took action on the issues right away when noticed, but instead, it was covered up, pipes were damaged beyond repair, and the city was stuck in this crisis for a year and a half, leading to significant long term effects for it's people

3)

Some have called this event as "a complete failure of government." Do you agree with this statement? What do you think was the most egregious failure?

Yes, I believe this could be considered a complete failure of government. I understand the need for budget cuts, but this was simply way too far and too dangerous and ended up costing magnitudes more than it was supposed to save. The most egregious failure would be the cost and corner-cutting on the city water system. It would have cost infinitely less to do things the right way the first time rather than putting the whole city in harm's way and ruining the whole cities infrastructure.