



**American Water Works
Association**

Public Affairs Advisory

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The Authoritative Resource for Safe Drinking Water SM

PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADVISORY

TO: AWWA Leadership
All Utilities

FROM: Jack W. Hoffbuhr

DATE: September 29, 2004

Who:	Washington Post
What:	Expected upcoming article on elevated lead levels in drinking water which is critical of water utilities
When:	Upcoming, possibly in the next few days

In the coming days, the Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com) is expected to run a story or series of stories extremely critical of utilities' testing and communications practices regarding lead in drinking water. The story will also criticize EPA and state regulatory oversight and the requirements of the Lead and Copper Rule.

Drinking water utilities nationwide should be prepared to answer media and consumer inquiries regarding lead contamination, corrosion control and public communications policies. Specific items that are believed to be in the story include:

- Allegations that utilities are manipulating their tests for lead in drinking water, withholding tests that show high lead levels, dropping homes with high lead levels from their sampling pools and breaking other rules,
- Charges that EPA and state regulators have been lax in enforcing lead rules, and in some cases have aided utilities in hiding high lead levels,
- Criticism of advice on how long to flush taps in order to reduce lead exposure,
- Observations that safe drinking water has been given a low priority at the federal level, especially within EPA.

Given that the Washington Post story is expected to take a national perspective (as opposed to the specific case in Washington, DC), other media outlets will in turn focus on the issue. As such, all utilities, and especially utilities that have experienced elevated lead levels, should be prepared to talk about lead levels in their water, their monitoring practices, and their policies for communicating with consumers on this and other issues. Attached are some general talking points that may help utilities in communicating to the public about lead in water, as well as AWWA's advice on steps consumers can take to protect themselves from lead exposure in drinking water. AWWA's fact sheet on lead is available at www.awwa.org/advocacy/pressroom/Lead.cfm.

Steps to Limit Lead Exposure in Drinking Water

While water providers have taken steps to limit lead in drinking water, you can take the following steps if you are concerned about your lead exposure:

- Find out about lead testing results in your community. Each utility's annual Consumer Confidence Report contains information on lead monitoring conducted under the Safe Drinking Water Act. If you do not have a Consumer Confidence Report, contact your utility for a copy.
- You can't see, smell or taste lead in your water. ***Testing at the tap is the only way to measure the lead levels in your home or workplace.*** If you choose to have your tap water tested, be sure to use a properly certified laboratory. Testing usually costs between \$20 and \$100.
- Flushing your water tap is a simple method to help you avoid high lead levels. Flushing clears water from your plumbing and home service line to ensure you are getting drinking water from the main, where lead is rarely present. Let the water run from the tap until it is noticeably colder (this may take two minutes or more) before using it for cooking or drinking. Flushing the tap is particularly important when the faucet has gone unused for more than a few hours, because the longer water resides in your home's plumbing, the more lead it may contain.

The water from this "first flush" need not be wasted. You can use it for other purposes such as watering plants. You might also consider drawing your drinking or cooking water shortly after a high-use water activity such as bathing or washing. Those activities will flush a significant amount of water from your home's pipes.

If you live in a high-rise building with many water pipes, flushing the tap may not be effective in reducing lead levels. If you are concerned about lead in your

drinking water, talk to your landlord or consult your local health department about ways to minimize your exposure.

- Use only cold water for cooking or drinking. Lead leaches more easily into hot water than cold water. Boiling water DOES NOT remove lead.
- Have a licensed plumber determine if your home contains lead solder, lead pipes or pipe fittings that contain lead. A plumber can also determine if your home has a lead service line connecting your home plumbing to the community water system's water main. The presence of these materials does not mean you have lead in your water, but the potential exists.
- Make sure that repairs to copper piping do not use lead solder.
- Some home treatment devices remove lead, but not all do. Before you purchase a home treatment device, you should verify the manufacturer's claims. A good resource to assist you is NSF International (www.nsf.org).

Once a treatment device is installed, make sure it is properly maintained. Using bottled water is also an alternative. (Information on the lead levels in bottled water is available from bottled water manufacturers.)

- Consult with your family doctor or pediatrician to receive a blood test for lead and learn more about the health effects associated with exposure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends all children be tested for lead.

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Suggested Talking Points

- We take seriously our obligation to protect families from lead in drinking water.
- The drinking water community supports the thorough examination of the situation in Washington, D.C. and the Lead and Copper Rule, which EPA is now undertaking. Any changes to the Lead and Copper Rule or the Safe Drinking Water Act should be based on the best available science.
- Consumers should be aware that most lead exposure comes from paint chips and dust in the home – not from drinking water. State and federal health agencies can provide resources that help consumers protect themselves from all sources of lead contamination.
- The drinking water community is committed to protecting public health. While the vast majority of water utilities do not exceed the lead action level, the drinking water community is continuing to explore ways to reduce the number of people exposed to lead in drinking water.
- The Lead and Copper Rule provides a framework for utilities to a) determine if their corrosion control program is effective at limiting lead exposure; b) take additional steps to protect public health; c) and ensure consumers are notified if the utility finds lead above the action level in the community.
 - The Lead and Copper Rule is based on a “treatment technique” requirement in which the lead action level is a trigger – the action level is not health based.
 - Monitoring under the LCR takes place at worst-case sampling locations as samples are taken of water standing overnight in homes where lead pipe or lead solder is present.
- Optimized corrosion control programs employed by water utilities are effective means of limiting lead exposure. EPA’s most recent data confirms that the elevated lead levels in Washington, D.C., are not common nationwide. More than 96 percent of utilities reporting data do not exceed the 15-parts-per-billion action level for lead.
- Lead in drinking water does not come from water leaving treatment plants or in water mains. In instances of high lead levels in water, the most common sources are lead-based solder used to join copper pipe, faucets made of brass and chrome-plated brass, and in some cases, pipes made of lead that connect a home to the water main.
- At high levels, lead can have serious health consequences. Concerned consumers can take additional steps to limit exposure from drinking water:
 - Draw water for drinking or cooking after another high water use activity such as bathing or washing your clothes so that fresh water is drawn into your household plumbing.

- Flush your water tap if the water in the faucet has gone unused for more than a few hours. Let the cold water run from the tap until it feels noticeably colder before using it for drinking or cooking (this may take two minutes or more). If you have a lead service line, you may need to flush for a longer time. Consult your utility if you have questions about how long to flush the line.
 - Consumers who choose to use a home filter to provide additional protection against lead should make sure it is NSF-certified for that purpose and is properly maintained.
 - Determine if lead is indeed present at levels of concern to you in your home by having your water tested by a state-certified laboratory.
 - (See attached sheet for more detailed explanation of how consumers can protect themselves)
- If any drinking water systems have intentionally withheld lead testing data, we find that troubling, and believe that those instances are extremely rare and should certainly be further examined. The vast majority of water utilities strictly adhere to all federal guidelines designed to protect and promote public health.
 - If done properly, flushing your water tap is a simple method to help you avoid high lead levels. Flushing clears water from your plumbing and home service line to ensure you are getting drinking water from the main, where lead is rarely present. Let the water run from the tap until it is noticeably colder (this may take two minutes or more) before using it for cooking or drinking. Flushing the tap is particularly important when the faucet has gone unused for more than a few hours, because the longer water resides in your home's plumbing, the more lead it may contain.