

Important Information about Lead and Your Family's Health City of Poughkeepsie

January 2008

In a recent round of testing, the City of Poughkeepsie found elevated levels of lead in drinking water in some homes and buildings within the City. This brochure provides more information about lead in drinking water, what you can do to find out whether there is lead in your water, and how to protect your family.

NOTE: This issue does not affect residents of the Town of Poughkeepsie, Arbors Condominiums, or the Village of Wappingers Falls.

Este folleto contiene información importante sobre plomo en el agua en la Ciudad de Poughkeepsie. Para obtener una copia de este folleto en español, por favor llame al 845-729-3945.

Dear City of Poughkeepsie Water Customers:

We have determined that tap water in some homes within the City of Poughkeepsie has begun to contain levels of lead above the Environmental Protection Agency's regulation of 15 parts per billion (ppb). The City routinely samples for lead and copper in the drinking water supply. Currently, the City is testing for lead in the water every six months. The last round of sampling was conducted between July and December 2007. The elevated levels of lead were detected during this most recent round of sampling. At this time, this issue does not affect the Town of Poughkeepsie or Village of Wappingers Falls. Water quality analyses have not shown elevated lead levels to date in those systems.

Lead in drinking water does not come from the treatment plant. However, homes built before 1986 may contain lead solder in the pipes. Lead enters the water by corrosion, or wearing away, of lead in the service line and household plumbing.

Under State and Federal law, we are required to have a program in place to minimize lead in your drinking water. This program includes corrosion control treatment, source water treatment, and public education, and is currently in progress. In addition, we are working closely with the Poughkeepsie Water Treatment Facility and County officials to address this issue and keep you informed. If you have any questions about how we are carrying out the requirements of the lead regulation, please give us a call at 845-729-3945.

I am taking this issue very seriously. Safeguarding your health is a top priority. We are hard at work to determine why we are finding some higher levels of lead in the City's drinking water, and we will solve this issue as quickly as possible.

Respectfully,



John C. Tkazyik
Mayor

Introduction

The New York State Health Department, Dutchess County Health Department, and the City of Poughkeepsie are concerned about lead in your drinking water. Although most homes have very low levels of lead in their drinking water, some homes in the community have lead levels above the action level of 15 parts per billion, or 0.015 milligrams of lead per liter of water. Under the State Sanitary Code we are required to have a comprehensive treatment program in place to minimize lead in your drinking water. This program includes corrosion control treatment, source water treatment (if necessary) and public education. We are also required to replace each lead service line if the line contributes lead concentrations of more than 15 parts per billion after we have completed modifications to the existing comprehensive treatment program. If you have any questions about how we are carrying out the requirements of the lead regulation please give us a call at 845-729-3945. This brochure explains the simple steps you can take to protect you and your family by reducing your exposure to lead in drinking water.

When City of Poughkeepsie water leaves the treatment plant, it does not contain lead. Lead can dissolve into the water inside your service connection or in your household plumbing.

Health Effects of Lead

Lead is a common metal found throughout the environment in lead-based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, certain types of pottery, porcelain, pewter and water. Lead can pose a significant risk to your health if too much of it enters your body. Lead builds up in the body over many years and can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys.

Lead can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. Please read this information closely to see what you can do to reduce lead in your drinking water.

The greatest risk is to young children and pregnant women. Amounts of lead that won't hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development of growing bodies. Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children. A child at play often comes into contact with sources of lead contamination, like dirt and dust, that rarely affect an adult. It is important to wash children's hands and toys often, and try to make sure they only put food into their mouths. Adults with kidney problems and high blood pressure can be affected by low levels of lead more than healthy adults. Lead is stored in the bones and can be released later in life. During pregnancy, the child can receive lead from the mother's bones, which may affect brain development.

Lead in Drinking Water

Although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, lead in drinking water can significantly increase a person's total lead exposure, particularly the exposure of infants who drink baby formulas and concentrated juices that are mixed with water. It is estimated that drinking water can make up to 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to lead.

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily because of corrosion, or wearing away, of materials containing lead in the water distribution system and household plumbing. These materials include lead-based solder used to join copper pipe, brass and chrome plated brass faucets, and at times, pipes made of lead that connect your house to the water main (service lines). In 1986, Congress banned the use of lead solder containing greater than 0.2 percent lead, and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes and other plumbing materials to 8.0 percent.

When water stands in lead pipes or plumbing systems containing lead for several hours or more, the lead may dissolve into your drinking water. This means the first water drawn from the tap in the morning, or later in the afternoon after returning from work or school, can contain high levels of lead.

Steps You Can Take in the Home to Reduce Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water

Despite our best efforts mentioned earlier to control water corrosivity and remove lead from the water supply, lead levels in some homes or buildings can be high. To find out whether you need to take action in your own home, have your drinking water tested to determine if it contains excessive concentrations of lead. Testing the water is essential because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. Some local approved environmental laboratories that provide this service are listed at the end of this booklet. For more information on having your water tested, please call 845-729-3945.

First, find out IF there is lead in your water. Have your water tested by a State-certified lab.

If a water test shows that the drinking water drawn from a tap in your home contains lead above 15 parts per billion, then you should take the following precautions:

1. **Run your tap water to flush it.** Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in a faucet has stood for more than six hours. The longer water resides in your home's plumbing the more lead it may contain. Flushing the tap means running the cold water faucet until the water gets noticeably colder, usually about 15 to 30 seconds.

If your house has a lead service line to the water main, you may have to flush the water for a longer time, perhaps one minute, before drinking. Although toilet flushing or showering flushes water through a portion of your home's plumbing system, you still need to flush the water in each faucet before using it for drinking or cooking. Flushing tap water is a simple and inexpensive measure you can take to protect your family's health. It usually uses less than one or two gallons of water and costs less than 30 cents per month. To conserve water, fill a couple of bottles for drinking water after flushing the tap, and whenever possible use the first flush water to wash dishes, watering plants or other purposes that do not involve cooking and drinking.

If, after testing you find that your water has elevated levels of lead, follow these steps to reduce your exposure:

- Run your tap water to flush it.
- Avoid cooking with or drinking hot tap water.
- Remove debris in new fixtures.
- Check your plumbing.
- Have an electrician check your wiring.

If you live in a high rise building, letting the water flow before using it may not work to lessen your risk from lead. The plumbing systems have more, and sometimes larger pipes than smaller buildings. Ask your landlord for help in locating the source of lead and for advice on reducing the lead level.

2. **Avoid cooking with or drinking hot tap water.** Do not cook with, or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold water tap and heat it on the stove.
3. **Remove debris in new fixtures.** Remove loose lead solder and debris from the plumbing by removing the faucet strainers from all taps and running the water from 3 to 5 minutes. Thereafter, periodically remove the strainers and flush out any debris that has accumulated.

4. **Check your plumbing.** If your copper pipes are joined with lead solder that has been installed illegally since it was banned in 1986, notify the plumber who did the work and request replacement of the lead solder with lead-free solder. Also, notify Bill Holman, City of Poughkeepsie Plumbing Inspector (845-451-4007) about the violation. Lead solder looks dull gray, and when scratched with a metal object looks shiny.
5. **Learn about your connection to the water main.** Determine whether the service line that connects your home or apartment to the water main is made of lead. The public water system that delivers water to your home should maintain records of the materials located in the distribution system. If they do not have any records concerning your service line, try to contact the plumbing contractor who installed the service line. You usually can identify the plumbing contractor by checking the office that issues or keeps records of the building permits (call George McGann at 845-451-4007). If the plumbing contractor can't be located, hire a licensed plumber to determine if the service line is made of lead. A licensed plumber can also check to see if your home's plumbing contains lead solder, lead pipes or pipe fittings that contain lead.
6. **Lead service lines.** If you determine that you have a lead service line that connects your dwelling to the water main and it contributes more than 15 parts per billion of lead to your drinking water, you may want to consider replacing your service line.
7. **Have an electrician check your wiring.** If grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes, corrosion may be greater. Check with the electrician or your local electrical code to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere. DO NOT attempt to change the wiring yourself because improper grounding can cause electrical shock and fire hazards.

The steps described above will reduce the lead concentrations in your drinking water. However, if a water test shows that the drinking water coming from your tap contains lead concentrations more than 15 parts per billion after flushing and after we have completed our actions to minimize lead levels, then you may want to take the following additional measures:

8. **Purchase or lease a home water treatment device to remove lead.** Home treatment devices are limited because each unit treats only the water that flows from the faucet to which it is connected, and all of the devices require periodic maintenance and replacement. Devices such as reverse osmosis systems or distillers can effectively remove lead from your drinking water. Some activated carbon filters may reduce lead levels at the tap, however, all lead reduction claims should be investigated. Be sure to check the actual performance of a specific home treatment device before and after installing the unit.
9. **Purchase bottled water.** Purchase, for drinking and cooking, bottled water that is certified by the New York State Department of Health.

For More Information

You can consult a variety of sources for additional information. Your family doctor or pediatrician can perform a blood test for lead and provide you with information about the health effects of lead. Information is available on the City of Poughkeepsie Web site at cityofpoughkeepsie.gov. State and local government agencies that can be contacted include:

Public Health Nursing of the Dutchess County Health Department (845-838-4800) can provide you with information about the health effects of lead. Environmental Health Services of the Dutchess

County Health Department (845-486-3404) can provide you with information about your community's water supply..

Bill Holman of the City of Poughkeepsie (845-451-4007) can provide you with information about building permit records that should contain the names of plumbing contractors that plumbed your home.

The following is a list of certified laboratories in your area that you can call to have your water tested for lead.

Smith Laboratory
4 Scenic Drive
Hyde Park, NY 12538
845-229-6536

EnviroTest Laboratories, Inc.
315 Fullerton Avenue
Newburgh, NY 12550
Phone: 845-562-0890
Fax: 845-562-0841
www.envirotestlaboratories.com