Understanding Lead in Drinking Water

Prepared for City of Toronto, Ohio water consumers

The City of Toronto supplies water to consumers in the City of Toronto and in the service area of the Jefferson County Water and Sewer District. We understand the concern about lead in drinking water and are providing this fact sheet to provide some basic information to consumers.

Why is Lead on Issue?

Lead exposure can cause serious health problems if too much lead enters the body, especially for vulnerable populations such as infants, young children, and pregnant women. Increased lead levels in the body have been linked to brain and kidney damage, interference with red blood cell production, and lowered IQ in children. Lead in drinking water is just one way a person can consume lead; other sources of lead in a person's environment add to the person's total lead exposure.

How does Lead get into Drinking Water?

Drinking water that is corrosive in nature can pick up lead particles from water service pipes and other plumbing components containing lead as it travels to the customer tap.

What is the City doing to Control Lead?

The City of Toronto adjusts the corrosiveness of the water to reduce the risk of lead contamination. We periodically test customer tap water, and so far testing has not shown high levels of lead. The City is updating its regulations to require lead service pipes be replaced in certain situations.

Could there be Lead in Your Drinking Water?

Since lead pipes and lead-containing plumbing components are present within our community, the risk of having lead in tap water still exists. Whether there is lead in your plumbing system depends on the age of the home or building, and whether plumbing has been replaced over time. Prior to the 1940s, lead was widely used as a material for water service pipes. Lead pipe is dull gray in color and will appear shiny when scratched. Lead pipes and solder were banned for use in drinking water systems in 1986. Other water system components that used lead must now be "lead-free".

Testing Your Tap Water

You cannot see, smell, or taste lead in drinking water; testing is the only way to determine the lead level. Tests should be performed by a laboratory certified by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. A level higher than 15 parts per billion is a concern.

How to Lower Lead Levels in Tap Water

Water exposed to lead plumbing that has not been used for several hours or overnight is at higher risk of containing elevated lead levels. Before using such water for drinking or cooking, flush the cold water faucet by allowing the water to run for several minutes. Larger and multi-story buildings may require a longer flushing time depending on the location of the water tap being used. The purpose of flushing is to flush out water that has been stagnant in the pipes, and to bring fresh water from the water main to the tap being used.

Questions?

Contact the City of Toronto Water Department at 740-537-2591.