



Speaking Notes on new Lead (Pb) Guidelines

New Guidelines:

On March 8, 2019, Health Canada released revised guidelines, significantly reducing the maximum allowable concentration of lead in drinking water.

Fact Sheet:

General details about lead, its risks, testing and the national Guidelines can be found in the CWWA Fact Sheet on Lead (Pb) attached. Greater detail can be attained from Health Canada and from your local public health authority.

Sector Support:

CWWA and our members, the municipal water professionals in Canada, fully support these new, science-based targets and support all efforts to one day eliminate all lead from drinking water. But we all need to recognize that these are aggressive targets that cannot be achieved overnight. There are significant challenges, mostly outside of municipal authority to address. So this will require a combined effort from federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as individual property owners to achieve these targets.

Municipal Drinking Water is Still Safe!

We need the message from all levels of government to be clear that NOTHING has changed overnight about the excellent quality of our municipal drinking water. We already rank amongst the safest drinking water in the world and we have merely set new targets to be even better. We have the greatest confidence in our national guidelines, the provincial regulations and oversight, and, most importantly, in the professionalism of our water operators.

Our Canadian municipal utilities provided their communities with the safest water yesterday and the safest water today and they will continue to provide the safest water tomorrow.

Where is the Lead?

In general, the water that is treated and distributed in municipal systems is lead-free. Water leaves the municipal treatment plants and travels through the 'water mains' (the large water pipes down each street) lead-free.

However, drinking water can come into contact with lead in the 'service lines' (the pipes that connect each property to the water main). Lead can also be found in the plumbing materials in the home or building, such as lead pipes, brass fixtures, and lead soldering.

The use of lead for service lines was phased out through the 1960's, so this is primarily an issue for older homes in older neighbourhoods. Many of these older homes have already had their lead service line fully replaced but may need to address lead plumbing and fixtures within the home or building. This is also true for older commercial and institutional buildings.

The Challenges:

Private Property:

The greatest challenge is that most of the presence of lead is on private property and within private homes and buildings. Most of the length of the lead service lines lies on private property and not within the municipal road allowance.

- This is outside of the authority of the municipal utility being held responsible for attaining these targets
- While municipalities work to incentivize property owners, there is no obligation to cooperate with any lead replacement/reduction plan
- Municipal utilities will be held responsible for the quality of the water tested from a consumer's tap within their premises as opposed to testing the water that is delivered to their property line

Cost and Disruption:

Tearing up streets and front yards to remove and replace lead service lines is very expensive and very disruptive to communities.

- This can also be very expensive and disruptive to the property owner.
- For many communities, this will require financial assistance from the federal and/or provincial governments as well as increased water rates or specific levies.
- Even with funding, this will take many years to complete

What Can Be Done in the Short Term?

There are steps a home owner can take in the short term to reduce the risks of lead. Older homes that have been identified as having lead service lines or that suspect lead in their plumbing and fixtures can:

- Run their taps for 10 minutes each morning or when they have not used water for a few hours as this will flush through any water that has been sitting in pipes and potentially exposed to lead.
- Filter their drinking water with a home point-of-use system that is CSA or NSF certified to remove lead. These vary from simple jug filters to installing a filter system under your sink or in your refrigerator system. It is very important that these filters are maintained and/or replaced in accordance with the product's recommended guidelines.

What Else Needs to Be Done?

Provincial/Territorial Regulators:

- First, we call upon each of the provincial/territorial ministries and departments responsible for water to recognize the challenges outlined above and to work with municipalities to develop a reasonable implementation plan before adopting or enforcing any new regulations.

Educating the Public:

- Success for all lies in engaging the public to cooperate in addressing lead removal in service lines and internal plumbing
- This will require a significant education campaign on the health risks of lead, the potential for lead in homes and the responsibility to address lead in your home and the need to cooperate with municipalities on projects to replace lead service lines
- Such a national campaign is best led by the federal level with support from provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as local public health authorities

Public Identification of Lead:

- All municipalities must complete an assessment of the risk of lead in their communities, complete adequate inventories of where lead exists (or is likely to exist) and this should be shared with the public
- It could be mandatory for the presence of Lead to be identified in home inspections so the potential home buyer can be made aware as this is a greater concern to those who are pregnant or with young children (similar to identifying asbestos or UFFI insulation)

Permissive Legislation:

- Each province and territory may need to reconsider any legislation that currently restricts municipal utilities from expending funds on private property or conducting work upon private property
- They may also wish to consider legislation forcing property owners to cooperate with and participate in service line replacement programs

Financial Supports:

- The federal and provincial governments need to identify specific funds to support municipal costs in such removal/replacement or alternative solutions, or identify lead reduction as a higher priority in existing infrastructure funding programs
- The federal and provincial governments need to consider financial incentives to property owners to take action, either through grants or tax rebates

These Speaking Notes and a Fact Sheet on Lead are available from:

Canadian Water and Waste Water Association www.cwwa.ca

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