

Does My Home's Plumbing Contain Lead?

Where to start?

Start by checking the pipe on the inlet side of your water meter. Water meters are generally found in your basement. Pipe from the water main may protrude out of the floor or wall and attaches to the inlet side of the meter. Flow on the meter is indicated by an arrow on the brass meter body. Take a knife or sharp object and scrape the pipe. If it is a shiny silver color or a dull silver gray and scrapes easily, it most likely is lead. A magnet will not stick to lead or copper, only galvanized. If it is copper, it won't scrape easily and will have a bright shiny copper color. If you are undecided on what you have, please give the Water Utility a call at 386-4815 and we would be happy to take a look. Also, if you find lead we would still appreciate the call so it can be documented.

Homes built prior to 1950 are more likely to have lead pipes coming to them. Homes built up into the 60's may have lead services from the water main to the shut off valve by the street to your home. This is because the street was built before 1950 and the service was stubbed in for the future when a home would be built at that location.

Homes built prior to 1984 may have solder containing lead at pipe joints. Copper pipes have to be joined together with a material (solder) that is melted into a pipe joint to create a water tight seal. This material (solder) was produced with a 40% lead and 60% tin make up in this product. Brass faucets and fittings also contain some lead in the metal alloy if produced before 2014. In 2014 it was mandated that all brass plumbing devices would not contain lead. This is another possible source besides the solder. Such devices to name a few are: brass faucets, brass fittings, backflow devices, pressure limiting devices and water meter bodies. Our water meter bodies were all replaced in 2016 throughout the city with lead free brass when we installed electronically read meters. Homes with just copper and brass plumbing (no lead piping) in the past have tested very low to not detectable.

Do galvanized pipes contain lead?

Some homes may have galvanized water pipes partially or throughout the home.

This was done because galvanized pipes are less susceptible to corrosion. The galvanized pipes installed on the water lines between 1880 and 1960 were dipped in molten, a naturally occurring zinc. Naturally occurring zinc is impure, so these pipes were bathed in zinc that also contained lead and other impurities. The zinc coating extended the life of pipes but added small amounts of lead and other substances that could potentially be harmful. Additionally, if your pipes were connected to lead plumbing (including lead services lines) there is more cause for concern. The corrosion inside galvanized steel pipes could have trapped small pieces of the lead. Even if the lead piping was removed years ago, galvanized steel pipes could still periodically release the trapped lead into the water flow. The only way to ensure that lead is not mobilized from the plumbing in any home is to replace the galvanized plumbing, any lead service lines and any brass plumbing items in the home.