

Lead update

Hello everyone. I would like to explain the notices that were sent out along with your utility bills. The notice's intent is to inform all of you that a recent DNR-required test for lead and copper in our drinking water was conducted in the city. We are required to perform lead and copper sampling on a few homes in the city every 3 years. The DNR requirements to qualify for the test are as follows: a home must have lead pipe coming from the shut off valve by the sidewalk to the water meter in the home. This qualifies the home by meeting the DNR's new Tier 1 requirement for testing. A search was conducted and 12 homes in the city were found to meet this requirement. Not every home in the city was inspected, just homes in suspected areas that lead was still believed to be present. The selected homes were asked if they would participate in the test. Everyone agreed. Instructions on how to perform the test, along with a new clean bottle to collect the sample, was provided. Samples were taken by the resident and picked up the same morning they were collected. The samples were sent the next day to a certified lab to be tested. Out of the 12 homes selected for the test, 3 homes tested slightly high for lead. Lead levels in these homes were found to be elevated and tested higher than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action limit for lead. This has triggered the public announcement that was sent out.

If your home has copper pipe to the meter, the plumbing in your home is copper and your home was built before 1984, you could have a slight concentration of lead in your water due to the lead solder. Another source is brass plumbing components. Faucets or other items produced before 2014, (there are many) can also contain lead in the brass alloy. Take a look at the article on our web site labeled "Does My Home Plumbing Contain Lead" to help with identifying your plumbing. Levels will most likely be well below the allowable limit set up by the EPA and deemed to be safe. Homes with just copper plumbing (no lead piping) in the past have tested very low to not detectable. If you still have concerns, please don't hesitate to call my office and we can discuss this. Remember, this problem did not just arise and has been in your homes for as long as you have owned it.

The infrastructure (underground sewer and water piping) in most of the city's streets has been replaced in the past 20 to 30 years, removing the lead service laterals from the street to the service valves by the sidewalk (Utility side). I have reviewed construction reports that we have on file from all streets that have been renovated over the years in search of lead services. Only a few have been found. This pretty much takes in the whole city. Now with that being said, when a street is renovated, it still is the responsibility of the homeowner to upgrade their service laterals for water and sewer from the sidewalk to their homes. If they choose not to do so, the city has not had any power to encourage a homeowner to do so. Due to pressure from the DNR to make our water safer, increasing rise in the cost to pump and treat fresh water for drinking, treating sewage over the last decade, is creating options for the Utility to make a homeowner replace laterals is becoming a reality.

The only two areas the city has left that have not been renovated are: 2 blocks of Hyland street going south from Center St to Oak Grove St, and Oak Street from Downtown going to the east from Fair St to the dead end of the 600 block. These two streets, starting with Hyland, are planned to be done starting in the spring of 2021 and finishing up with Oak St by the fall of 2022. These two streets have lead services coming off of the water main in the street to the Utility service shut off valve located between the street and the sidewalk. Some homes in that area have lead pipes from the service valve by the sidewalk to the home but only a few. Most of the homes in that area were inspected by my staff last fall. If no one from the Utility was in your home to inspect last fall and you think you may have lead pipe entering you home, please give my office a call at 920-386-4815 to let us know.

Water quality reports on our website are from the previous year. Data must be collected and sorted to generate these reports usually by July of the following year, so the 2020 report will be out sometime in July of 2021. In the 2019 report that is on our site until July, you will see that there are no lead violations.

Again, if you have any questions, please feel free to call between 7 and 3:30 Monday through Friday. Thank You. Stay tuned for further updates on our website.

Tim Gassner
Juneau Water/Wastewater Superintendent