

What you should know about...

# LEAD IN YOUR DRINKING WATER

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A Publication of the Hackettstown Municipal Utilities Authority (HMUA)

November 2010

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## To Our Customers:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the HMUA 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 EPA action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb), or 0.015 milligrams of lead per liter of water (mg/L). Under Federal law, we are required to have a program in place to minimize lead in your drinking water by July 1995.

The program includes:

- 1) corrosion control treatment (treating the water to make it less likely that lead will dissolve into the water);
- 2) source water treatment (removing any lead that is in the water at the time it leaves our treatment facility); and
- 3) a public education program.

We are also required to replace each lead service line that we control if the line contributes lead concentrations of more than 15 ppb after we have completed the comprehensive treatment program. Service lines, or connections, are the pipes that bring water from the water main in the street to your home.

Remember -- not every home has a lead contamination problem. Most people have low levels of lead in their drinking water. But because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead, testing the water is the only way to know for sure whether or not you have a problem.

We can help. In this newsletter, we tell you how and where to get your water tested. We also explain the simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family by reducing your exposure to lead from drinking water.

If you have any questions about how we are carrying out the requirements of the lead regulation, or want more information about what you can do, please give us a call at 908-852-3622.

*Bruce D. Smith*  
Executive Director

*Hackettstown Municipal Utilities Authority*



# LEAD IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

## 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 and 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. 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 in the growing bodies of children. In addition, a child at play often comes into contact with sources of lead contamination -- like dirt and dust -- that rarely affect an adult. If a child puts dirty fingers into his mouth (as most children do), some lead

may be absorbed into the child's system. It is important, therefore, to wash children's hands and toys often and to try to make sure they only put food in their mouths.

## Lead in Drinking Water

Lead in drinking water, although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, 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. EPA estimates that drinking water can make up 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to lead.

## How Lead Enters Our Water

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in water supplies like rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of the 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, in some cases, 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 in the pipes or solder may dissolve into your drinking water. This means the first water drawn from the tap in the morning, or later in the afternoon after you return from work or school, can contain fairly high levels of lead.

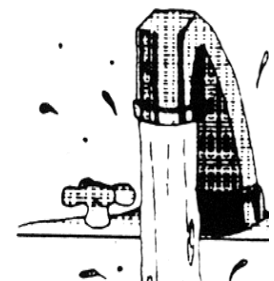
## Steps You Can Take in the Home to Reduce Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water

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 laboratories that can provide this service are listed at the end of this newsletter. For more information on having your water tested, please call 908-852-3622.

If a water test indicated that the drinking water drawn from a tap in your home contains lead above 15 ppb or 0.015 mg/L, then you should take the following precautions:

**Flush Your System.** Flushing tap water is a simple and inexpensive measure you can take to protect your family's health. Flushing usually uses less than one or two gallons of water and costs less than 28 cents per month.

To flush, let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in a faucet has gone unused for more than six hours. The longer water resides in you 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 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.



To conserve water, fill a couple of bottles with water after flushing the tap, and whenever possible use the first flush water to wash dishes or water plants.

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

**Use only cold water for cooking and drinking.** Try not to cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve more lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold tap and heat it on the stove.

**Remove loose solder and debris** from the plumbing materials installed in newly constructed homes or homes in which the plumbing has recently been replaced. To do this, remove the faucet strainers from all taps and run the water from 3 to 5 minutes. Thereafter, periodically remove the strainers and flush out any debris that has accumulated over time.

**Identify and replace lead materials with lead-free ones.** 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 that he or she replace the lead solder with lead-free solder. Lead solder looks dull gray, and when scratched with a key looks shiny. In addition, notify your State Department of Environmental Protection about the violation.

**Determine whether or not the service line that connects your home or apartment building to the water main is made of lead.** The best way to determine if your service line is made of lead is by either hiring a licensed plumber to inspect the line or by contacting the plumbing contractor who installed the line. You can identify the plumbing contractor by checking the city's record of building permits, which should be maintained by your municipality's construction official (see page 4 of this newsletter). A licensed plumber can, at the same time, check to see if your home's plumbing contains lead solder, lead pipes, or pipe fittings that contain lead.

The public water system that delivers water to your home should also maintain a record of the materials located in your distribution system. If the service line that connects your dwelling to the water main contributes more than 15ppb to drinking water,



after our comprehensive treatment program is in place, we are required to replace the line. If the line is only partially controlled by the HMUA, we are required to provide you with information on how to replace your portion of the service line and offer to replace that portion of the line at your expense. We must also take a follow-up tap water sample within 14 days of the replacement. Acceptable replacement alternatives include copper, steel, iron, and plastic pipes.

**Have an electrician check your wiring.** If grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes, corrosion may be greater. Check with a licensed 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.

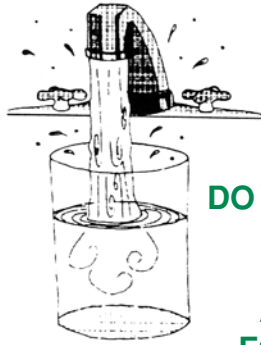
### **Additional Steps**

The steps described above will reduce the lead concentrations in your drinking water. However, if a water test indicates that the drinking water coming from your tap contains lead concentrations in excess of 15 ppb after flushing, or after we have completed our actions to minimize lead levels, then you may want to take the following additional measures:

**Purchase or lease a home treatment device.** Home treatment devices are limited in that 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.

**Purchase bottled water for drinking and cooking.**

HMUA  
424 Hurley Drive  
PO Box 450  
Hackettstown, NJ 07840



**DO YOU HAVE LEAD IN YOUR  
DRINKING WATER?**

**An Important Message  
From Your Water Supplier**

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT # 362  
HACKETTSTOWN NJ



## 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.

State and Local government agencies that can be contacted include:

Hackettstown Municipal Utilities Authority at 908-852-3622

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection at 609-292-5550

can provide you with information about your community's water supply and a list of local laboratories that have been certified by the State for testing water quality.

Town of Hackettstown Construction Official at 908-850-0660

Township of Independence Construction Official at 908-637-6104

Township of Mansfield Construction Official at 908-689-5624

Township of Mt. Olive Construction Official at 973-691-0900

Township of Washington Code Enforcement Official at 908-876-4711

can provide you with information about building permit records that should contain names of plumbing contractors that plumbed your home.

Township of Mt. Olive Health Department at 973-691-0900

Township of Washington Health Department at 908-876-3650

Warren County Health Department at 908-475-7960

State of New Jersey Health Department at 1-800-367-6543

can provide you with information about the health effects of lead and tell you how and where you can have your child's blood tested.

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

Accutest Laboratory at 732-329-0200

QC, Inc. at 1-800-289-8378

Garden State Laboratory, Inc. at 908-688-8900