

Brief Questions and Answers About Lead in RLMA Drinking Water

Question: What is lead?

Answer: Lead is a naturally occurring metal that is everywhere in the natural environment in air, water and soil. Because lead is everywhere in the environment, everyone has some amount of lead in his or her body.

Question: Why is lead in drinking water a concern?

Answer: The accumulation of high levels of lead in the human body, particularly children, is associated with significant negative health effects including damage to the nervous system. Any pathway, such as drinking water, that introduces lead into the body is a concern.

Question: Where does lead in drinking water come from?

Answer: Lead in drinking water comes almost exclusively from old pipes in the drinking water distribution system and from the plumbing in older homes. The lead in these old pipes can leach into drinking water passing through them if the water is not properly treated at its source to prevent leaching. In 1986, a lead solder ban was put into effect for future plumbing. However, many older homes constructed before 1986 still have lead solder in copper pipes.

Question: What does RLMA add to its drinking water to prevent leaching from old pipes containing lead?

Answer: RLMA adds zinc orthophosphate to its drinking water to prevent lead from leaching into the drinking water. The PADEP has approved this method for the RLMA water system.

Question: How does zinc orthophosphate work to prevent lead from leaching into drinking water?

Answer: Zinc orthophosphate forms a protective coating on the inside of pipes that effectively prevents any lead in old pipes from leaching into drinking water.

Question: What government agencies regulate lead in drinking water?

Answer: Nationally, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in Pennsylvania, the PADEP, regulate lead in drinking water.

Question: What is the limit for lead in drinking water?

Answer: EPA requires that the concentration of lead in drinking water at the customer's faucet be less than 0.015 milligrams per liter of water. That's the same as 0.015 parts per million or 15 parts per billion. If 90% of tested homes are below the 15 ppb action level, a water system is considered safe.

Question: What happened to the water in Flint?

Answer: The facts are not all known, but what is known is that Flint, Michigan switched its raw water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River. The Flint River is more acidic than the previous source of water. The more acidic water apparently degraded the protective coating that was present in the water distribution pipes and household plumbing. This allowed lead to be leached from the older pipes. At the same time, the water supplier in Flint stopped adding a corrosion inhibitor that prevented lead from leaching out of old pipes in an attempt to save money. These missteps caused a significant spike in lead concentrations in the drinking water supply.

Question: Should I be concerned about the same thing happening here?

Answer: No. RLMA has a stable and safe raw water supply that has been used since the 1920's. RLMA constantly monitors its raw water supply and finished water to make sure it is safe for its customers. RLMA also uses zinc orthophosphate to prevent lead from leaching into the water from old pipes.

Question: Where can I obtain more information about lead in drinking water?

Answer: Both US EPA and PA DEP have significant amounts of information about lead in drinking water on their web sites: <http://www.epa.gov/your-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water> and <http://www.dep.pa.gov/Citizens/My-Water/PublicDrinkingWater/Pages/Lead-in-Drinking-Water.aspx#.Vs3L-Mc5n0s>