

What DC Residents Should Know



about DC government's independent testing for

LEAD IN OUR DRINKING WATER:

A MESSAGE FROM CONCERNED
ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY GROUPS

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By



The Alliance for Healthy Homes
Clean Water Action
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Why Independent Testing?



In response to a series of public testimonies raising questions about ongoing problems with lead in DC's drinking water, on February 22, 2008, DC Council Member Jim Graham proposed that DC government conduct

INDEPENDENT TESTING

to assess whether our water is safe to drink.

Background



So far, all official testing of DC's drinking water has been conducted by the DC Water and Sewer Authority (DC WASA).

DC WASA failed to properly inform DC residents about astronomical levels of lead in our drinking water between 2001-4, thus exposing infants, children, pregnant women, and other vulnerable people to chronic and unprecedented lead-in-water hazards.

DC WASA's Assurances



On the basis of its own testing, DC WASA claims that the District's lead-in-water problem was solved in 2005 and that our water has been safe to drink for the past 3 1/2 years.

Troubling Evidence



Despite DC WASA's assurances, however, independent studies and internal agency documents strongly suggest that significant **lead-in-water problems persist.**

What is the Evidence?



- **2005**
University of California, Berkeley study
Virginia Tech data
- **2006-2007**
DC WASA internal data, obtained through
Freedom of Information Act requests
- **2004-2008**
DC Public School data, obtained through
Freedom of Information Act requests and
independent testing

Specifically...

In 2005



A study coordinated by the University of California, Berkeley found a high number of DC homes with elevated levels of lead in water.*

Virginia Tech discovered similar problems.

*Adarkwah, N. E., et al. 2005. Investigation of Higher Than Standard Lead Concentrations in Drinking Water From Washington, D.C. Paper presented at the American Geophysical Union Fall meeting.

In the Second Half of 2006



Random homeowner samples sent to DC WASA for testing exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action level for lead.

These samples should have had lead levels much lower than in the high-risk homes that DC WASA is supposed to target for compliance with federal requirements.

In the Second Half of 2007



DC WASA's 2nd draw samples (i.e., samples collected after brief flushing) from homes tested for federal compliance exceeded EPA's lead action level.

Although EPA does not count 2nd draw samples for compliance, such samples are more representative of the water we use for drinking and cooking, compared to 1st draw samples.

DC Schools 2004-2008



- In 2004, DC WASA declared DC school water safe.
- It was later discovered that they had used a sampling method known to hide lead (later, the method was effectively banned by EPA).
- Freedom of Information requests have revealed hazardous levels of lead in school water through 2007.
- In 2007, Mayor Fenty took remedial action that included installation of lead filters.
- Even in 2008, an average of 16% of water taps continued to dispense elevated lead levels in high-risk schools.

The Link Between Schools and Homes



DC schools have no lead service lines and otherwise their plumbing does not differ markedly from that in DC homes.

That DC school problems persist raises serious questions about the safety of tap water in DC homes, many of which continue to have partial or full lead service lines.

The Big Question



Since 2005, DC WASA has claimed compliance with federal lead safety standards.

If DC's lead-in-water problems persist, how can it be that DC WASA is able to comply with these standards?

DC WASA's Testing Program



Since 2005, DC WASA has required homeowners to flush home plumbing for 10 minutes the night before sampling.

This type of flushing does not reflect normal water use for most homes.

Flushing for 10 minutes on the eve of sampling has been shown to temporarily lower lead-in-water levels and skew test results.

We Now Also Know That...



In 2006 and 2007, DC WASA collected no water samples during 8 warm weeks of the year when the data show that lead in water is highest.

(This practice may have started in 2005, but we don't have complete data on that year).

Why We Need Reliable Data



Because lead in water poses a serious health risk to fetuses, infants, children, and other vulnerable people and it must be addressed appropriately.

Water's Contribution to Blood Lead Levels



EPA estimates that in cities like DC with lead service lines and corrosive water:

“[T]he total drinking water contribution to overall lead levels may range from as little as **5 percent to more than 50 percent** of children’s total lead exposure. Infants dependent on formula may receive **more than 85 percent** of their lead from drinking water.”

[Federal Register, Vol. 56, No. 110, June 7, 1991, p. 26470].

Blood Lead Data from DC



Independent research by Virginia Tech professor and 2007 MacArthur Fellow Marc Edwards revealed that:

Contrary to official statements that no one in DC was seriously harmed from the 2001-4 lead-in-water contamination, “there was a clear connection between lead-contaminated water and elevated blood lead levels in some DC children.”

Blood Lead Data from DC - Cont'd



In 2007-2008, lead-contaminated drinking water was implicated as either the only or a contributing source of lead exposure for **10% of DC children** with elevated blood lead levels whose home tap water was analyzed.

Water samples were taken in only 64% of cases.

Blood Lead Data from DC - Cont'd



Despite official denials of continuing lead-at-the-tap problems, three children with lead poisoning had water as the only identified lead hazard in the home.

The Promise of the Independent Test



Exposure to lead in water can be easily prevented,
IF consumers know that there is a problem.

If done correctly, DC government's independent testing offers the first opportunity for a comprehensive and reliable assessment of our water.

Water Quality Task Force



The independent testing will be led by the District Department of the Environment (DDOE), and overseen by a task force that will include:

- DC WASA
- Environmental and public health organizations
- Office of the City Administrator
- Office of Councilmember Jim Graham
- US EPA and EPA Region III
- Virginia Tech
- Washington Aqueduct
- Williams and Cunningham

Join the Effort!



ALL TASK FORCE MEETINGS ARE
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

If You Would Like...



...to help ensure that the testing is carried out properly and/or to receive updates, meeting times and locations, please send your name and e-mail address to:

pnalternatives@yahoo.com

Task force minutes will be posted on the DC Department of the Environment (DDOE) website:

<http://ddoe.dc.gov/ddoe/cwp/view,a,1209,q,498508.asp>

Thanks!



If you have any questions,
feel free to call:

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