



Drinking Water Fact Kit

Lead in Drinking Water

While the 1996 revisions to the Safe Drinking Water Act significantly changed the lead requirements for materials used in residential plumbing, older fixtures and lead water lines are still in service in many communities, and they can potentially contribute lead into a home's drinking water supply.

Individuals living in older homes should check to see if a lead service line connects the home to the public water system. The local water department can usually inspect the line coming into the home or check their records to confirm if the home is connected to the water system by a lead service line.

In addition to lead service lines, faucets and lead-based solder can also contribute small amounts of lead into drinking water, especially if produced and installed before 1998. As a result, some individuals who don't have lead service lines can still have unsafe levels of lead in their drinking water. Water testing can help determine if a home's lead content is below the federal limit of 0.015 mg/L. If it exceeds this level, options include having the lead service line replaced, using a home water treatment product certified for lead reduction, or using certified bottled water.

Home Water Treatment Options

While replacement of the lead service line may be desirable, it isn't always possible. Depending upon the lead levels being detected, home water treatment devices may be a practical option. There are filters, reverse osmosis units and distillers certified for lead reduction. Certification means a sample of a system was independently tested to verify it could reduce 0.150 mg/L to 0.010 mg/L or less.

Since a low pH in private wells can also cause lead leaching, an acid neutralizing system may be needed to correct the situation.

These systems add a chemical to the water, such as soda ash or lime, to boost the pH until it is raised above 7.0. These systems can also help to reduce copper leaching that is attributable to low pH.

Most water treatment systems have replaceable components, so be sure to follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions for any water treatment system. For filters, this means changing the filter at the recommended intervals, usually determined in gallons. For reverse osmosis units, this means monitoring the total dissolved solids (TDS) content of the water being produced by the system to ensure the membrane continues to be effective. By proper selection, use and maintenance, home water treatment systems can help consumers reduce contaminants such as lead from their incoming drinking water supply.



Be sure to test the lead levels in your drinking water, especially if you live in an older home.