

# WHAT'S ON TAP



NEWS FOR DC WATER CUSTOMERS • VOLUME 17 ISSUE 3



## GENERAL MANAGER'S MESSAGE

Dear Customers:

I'm sure many of you have been following the news about the lead crisis in Flint, Michigan.



What has happened there is tragic and our hearts go out to the residents of that city. For those of us who work in the public water sector, it is the stuff of nightmares. We never want our customers to have to worry about the safety of the life sustaining water we provide.

Years ago, the District did face a similar lead-in-water issue. What our agency learned in that era is instructive today in Flint and across the country. Almost all reported elevated levels of lead in drinking water come from service lines or household plumbing – not the source water, water treatment or distribution system.

Today, our drinking water is safe and our rigorous testing program shows lead is at historically low levels. Still, every property is different and in this issue of *What's on Tap* you will learn how to tell if there is lead in the pipes that run through your property or the plumbing fixtures. We also offer free lead test kits, and we stand ready to help you and answer any questions you might have. Protecting public health is our top priority and we want you to be completely informed about this important issue.

*George S. Hawkins*

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## What you need to know about lead in drinking water

DC Water considers lead in drinking water to be a serious health risk and offers resources and recommendations to help customers minimize exposure.

### How does lead enter the drinking water?

Drinking water is lead-free when it leaves the treatment plant, but when water travels through pipes and plumbing fixtures that contain lead, this lead can be released. Some older pipes that connect a property's plumbing to the water mains are still made of lead. Other sources include old iron pipes, lead solder, and brass faucets or fixtures inside homes.

**Are there lead sources for drinking water in every DC home?** Lead sources and lead levels in drinking water vary between buildings, so it is important to identify and remove all lead sources from each property. Some service lines that run from the main into the home contain lead. In addition, some plumbing fixtures and joint solder inside homes can contain lead.

**How do I know if lead is present in my water?** First, determine if you have a lead service pipe or household plumbing that contain lead. Call DC Water at (202) 354-3600 to review pipe records for your property. Customers can inspect the service pipe at the entrance point, often located

on the lowest level or in a basement. Lead pipe is a grey color and can be easily scratched with a coin. A licensed plumber can also evaluate the service pipe, household plumbing and fixtures for lead or lead-containing materials.

DC Water offers free lead test kits by request at (202) 354-3600. It is also important to evaluate pipe and interior plumbing materials. Sometimes, a test may not identify all possible sources.

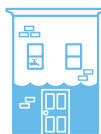
**How do I remove lead sources?** Replace a lead service pipe with copper pipe. DC Water will replace your lead service pipe from the main to your property line if you choose to replace the portion that runs from your property line into your home. For additional information, contact Customer Service at (202) 354-3600. Replace old iron plumbing. In households that have or previously had a lead service pipe, lead can accumulate on the inside of some iron pipes. Install lead-free plumbing fixtures.

**I believe I have sources of lead in my home. What should I do until they are removed?** Use filtered tap water for drinking and cooking until all sources of lead are removed. This is especially important for pregnant or nursing women and children under age six. Select a filter certified to remove lead. The filter must meet NSF Standard 53 for lead removal. Run the cold water tap when water is not used for several hours before using it for drinking or cooking. Lead and other metals can dissolve in water when it sits in pipes for a few hours. Regularly remove and clean faucet aerators, because sediment can collect in the screen.



## Save money by fixing costly leaks

Leaks cost money! Leaking plumbing and equipment can increase a family's water bill by 10 percent. A leaking toilet wastes a gallon of water per minute, which can cost more than \$400 in a month. During Fix-a-Leak Week (March 14 to 20), DC Water reminds customers to check, twist and replace leaking fixtures to save money on their water bill and avoid wasting water.



**1. Check** for leaks and compare your water bills. A four-person household generally uses less than 12,000 gallons of water per month, so higher usage may

indicate leaks. See your own water usage online at [dcwater.com](http://dcwater.com). To check for a toilet leak, place a leak detection tablet or several drops of food dye in the toilet tank. If any color appears in the toilet bowl without flushing, you have a leak.



**2. Twist** to stop fixtures from leaking. Tighten hoses, pipe connections, showerheads and faucet valves to form a good seal. Twist a WaterSense®-labeled aerator onto bathroom and sink faucets.



**3. Replace** when necessary. Most toilet leaks are the result of worn-out flappers, which are inexpensive and easy to install. Replace gaskets and washers to stop fixtures from dripping. If you still have a drip, you probably need to replace the fixture. Look for the Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense label on equipment. For more information, visit: [www3.epa.gov/watersense/index.html](http://www3.epa.gov/watersense/index.html).

DC Water strongly encourages customers to contact Customer Service immediately at (202) 354-3600 if they receive an unusually high bill or a notification from the High Usage Notification Alert (HUNA) system. DC Water can send an inspector to investigate for a suspected leak or broken water service line.



## TOWN HALL MEETINGS ARE COMING

Soon it will be time for the annual Budget Town Hall Meetings. Each spring, DC Water co-hosts these meetings with each ward councilmember. It is a great opportunity to speak with CEO and General Manager George Hawkins about the budget and proposed rates for the next fiscal year. Please visit [dcwater.com/rates](http://dcwater.com/rates) in the coming weeks to learn more.

## DC Water's largest interceptor sewer gets its first cleaning

An important part of DC's sewer system is getting an overdue cleaning. The Potomac Interceptor (PI) is an extremely large sewer main that runs from Dulles Airport to the Potomac Pumping Station under the foot of the Roosevelt Bridge in the District. Sewage flows through this sewer from portions of Virginia, Maryland, and the District, along the Potomac River. It was built in 1961 and this is its first cleaning.

The work is being performed to prolong the life of the large sewer main and to alleviate future overflows from the sewer. The PI runs along the Potomac River and under the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, so getting access to part of the sewer required coordination with many agencies including the National Park Service, the U.S. Park Police and the Kennedy Center, among others. To complicate an already complex operation, the Kennedy Center began its expansion last spring and can only provide access to DC Water through March 2016.

To meet this very strict deadline, DC Water's contractor has been working in shifts around the clock, seven days a week, even through January's blizzard.

In just the first couple of weeks, crews removed 190 tons of debris and expect to retrieve up to 3,000 tons of debris from inside the sewer. That is the equivalent of 750 elephants!

For more information, please call the Office of External Affairs at (202) 787-2200.



**REMINDER:** As noted in last month's issue of *What's on Tap*, the disinfectant used to treat drinking water will temporarily switch from chloramine to chlorine, from March 7 through May 2, 2016. For more information, contact the Drinking Water Division at (202) 612-3440.



### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

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