Lead: What to know

Lead is a metal that occurs naturally in the environment. It is poisonous to humans and animals when consumed. Among other things, in the past lead has been used in household plumbing and well systems.

Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the body, and the main target for lead toxicity is the nervous system. High lead levels can severely damage the brain and kidneys in adults or children and be lethal. In pregnant women, high exposure levels may cause miscarriage.

Fortunately, the presence of lead in groundwater tends to be very small.

If you install a treatment system, always follow the manufacturer’s maintenance instructions.

3. Flush water that has been sitting in your water system for a long time (such as overnight) to remove water into which lead has leached. Experiment with testing the water after flushing from different taps to determine the best length of time to flush.

Get well owners manual

A 32-page booklet that includes a well log, and information on well maintenance, water quality and testing, and frequently asked questions is available from the Water Systems Council.

Limited supplies are available. To request a free copy, contact Charlene Greenstreet at cgreenstreet@watersystemscouncil.org or call 202-625-4387.

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Have a question?
Visit the wellcare® Hotline at 888-395-1033 888-395-1033 FREE

Private Well Owner Tip Sheet

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A greater concern is lead in galvanized steel pipes, certain brass used in plumbing fixtures or well components, and certain solder used to connect pipes and joints. While lead content allowed in plumbing and well components has been greatly reduced—most recently in 2014—it can still be a health risk for houses and/or well systems that pre-date federally mandated lead content reductions.

The federal Maximum Contaminant Level for lead in public drinking water systems is 15 parts per billion—a good guide for private well owners testing their drinking water.

Two factors that can affect how much lead leaches into the water are:
1. The length of time water is in contact with lead before being used
2. The corrosiveness of the water due to either high pH or low pH.

Use a qualified water well system professional to determine the source of lead in your water. If the groundwater coming into the well is not the problem, the professional can check your well system for components that contain higher lead levels. A plumber may be able to identify lead sources in household plumbing.

If such components are the lead source, the homeowner has three basic options:

1. Replace the problem components with new ones that meet current federal requirements.
2. Treat the water that is being consumed. The National Sanitation Foundation recommends appropriate filters, reverse osmosis units, and distillers. Make sure the system is certified under NSF/ANSI standards for lead reduction from 0.150 mg/L to 0.010 mg/L or less.

Sometimes lead problems in drinking water are due to low pH. When pH levels drop below 7.0, water becomes acidic, which can cause lead to leach from plumbing fixtures. Acid neutralizing systems are generally used to correct this situation.

Don’t forget: National Groundwater Awareness Week is right around the corner.

- Do you want peace of mind about your well water?
- Are other well owners testing their water?
- Do you want to protect your property values by addressing any water quality issues?
- Is there a known health risk associated with your area groundwater?

Don’t pass up this opportunity to learn about groundwater and your well. Visit www.WellOwner.org.

The Private Well Class, partnering with the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), is excited to announce that NEHA now offers The Private Well Class as a 10-lesson course on their e-Learning website.

Each lesson is available for one Continuing Education (CE) Credit from NEHA for any credential program that accepts NEHA CE Credits. The course is completely free, and each lesson can be taken independently.

To learn more, click here.