

Lead & Copper in Drinking Water

Recent concerns (Flint, MI; Sebring, OH; Chagrin Falls, OH) regarding lead contamination in drinking water have prompted questions regarding the safety of drinking water in Oberlin. The following information is gathered to answer questions you may have from citizens in our community:

USEPA issued the Lead and Copper rules (LCR) on June 7, 1991. These rules apply to all community drinking water systems in the United States. Ohio subsequently adopted these rules and assumes primary regulatory enforcement in our state. The purpose of these rules is to protect public health by minimizing lead and copper levels in drinking water, primarily by reducing water corrosiveness. Lead (Pb) and copper (Cu) enter drinking water mainly from corrosion of lead and copper plumbing materials.

The lead and copper rules establish action levels of 15 parts per billion for Pb and 1300 parts per billion for Cu based on the 90th percentile of tap water samples. An exceedance of these action levels is not a violation but can trigger other requirements that include additional water quality monitoring, corrosion control treatment, source water monitoring/treatment, public education, and lead service line replacement.

USEPA maintains that the implementation of the LCR has resulted in the reduction of risk of exposure to Pb that can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells, and kidneys, especially for young children and pregnant women. In addition, the LCR has resulted in a reduction in the risk of exposure to Cu that can cause stomach and intestinal distress, liver or kidney damage, and complications of Wilson's disease in genetically predisposed people.

Water distribution and plumbing systems in the US, including in Oberlin, consist of lead jointed pipes and lead service lines, as well as copper and brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) services and fittings that can introduce Pb and Cu contamination under corrosive conditions. The Oberlin Water Department has followed all testing protocols since the LCR was first introduced in 1991. Our system has subsequently been placed on a reduced monitoring schedule due to very low levels of Pb and Cu. Oberlin now tests 20 residences for Pb and Cu every three years. The test sites were selected and approved by OEPA as representative of Oberlin's distribution system and are collected under strict optimal conditions (worst case scenario) for the detection of Pb and Cu. Test results can be found on our annual consumer confidence reports (CCR). In addition, each of the volunteers that collect samples at their residence receives a copy of their results.

Oberlin Water Department staff takes its responsibility to protect customers from lead and copper exposure seriously. Your Water Department has been proactive in treatment processes and has been practicing corrosion control for many years. Your drinking water is not only tested for Pb and Cu on a tri-annual basis, but treated daily and tested weekly for successful corrosion control. The process of lime softening and treatment used at the Oberlin WTP inhibits Pb and Cu from contaminating your drinking water.

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