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**L.E.A.D.: Lead Emergency Action for the District calls on Mayor Bowser to remove lead from our drinking water**

*L.E.A.D. was a group founded in February 2004, a coalition of concerned citizens, advocates, and scientists from across the District. Today, we invite you to join L.E.A.D. in our revitalized push to finally end the decades-long leaching of lead into our water. Join us in asking Mayor Bowser to devote federal funding to getting lead drinking water pipes out of the District.*

**Dear Mayor Bowser:**

**We, residents of the District, urge you to allocate \$350 million of the District's \$2.2 billion in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan to fully remove the [District's tens of thousands of lead drinking water pipes \(service lines\)](#). There is [no safe level of lead](#), and yet every day thousands of Washingtonians -- including pregnant people, infants dependent on reconstituted formula, and young children -- are drinking water through a lead straw. Allocating these funds will finally put us on the road to solve this problem once and for all. It will benefit people, especially children, across the District.**

[For decades, DC Water customers have lived with the ever-present threat posed by the continued presence of lead drinking water service lines](#), which are pipes made of 100% pure lead. In 2004, the [Washington Post exposed that thousands of homes in the District had extraordinarily high levels of lead in drinking water](#). Many people are shocked to learn that nearly all of those pipes are still in the ground and that there is still widespread exposure. Research has confirmed this, for example in 2011, the [CDC published a study about our city](#), associating lead service lines with elevated blood lead levels in our children.

Many [other cities](#), including Flint, Newark, Detroit and Pittsburgh have made great progress in getting their lead service lines fully replaced. This moment is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that would help transform our City's health by finally freeing the District of one of the most significant sources of lead in our water. We ask that you allocate these funds to full lead service line removal. We join [DC Water](#), and [6](#)

[Members of the DC Council](#) to request that you dedicate \$350 million to solve this problem.

**We request:**

- \$350 million be dedicated to lead service line removal;
- Lead service lines are removed in their entirety, systematically (block-by-block, not one-offs), at no cost to homeowners; and
- Highest-risk and underserved areas of the District to be prioritized (and public input and transparency in deciding which areas are considered high priority)

Sincerely,

**Lead Emergency Action for the District (L.E.A.D.)**

[Add your name \(click on the link to add your name\)](#)

Randy Speck  
Chair  
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3/4G

Paul Schwartz and Yanna Lambrinidou  
Co-Founders  
Campaign for Lead Free Water

Chris Weiss  
Executive Director  
DC Environmental Network

Anna Sewell  
Staff Attorney  
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Valerie Baron  
Senior Attorney  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
(Former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, 1A01)

## What is a service line? What is a lead service line?

A service line is the pipe (aka a lateral) that connects water mains under the street to individual buildings. A lead service line is a service line made of 100% pure lead. A “partial” lead service line is present when part of a home’s service line is made of lead and part is made of another material (typically copper). A partial lead service line is *not* safer than an intact lead service line. In fact, under certain circumstances, a [partial lead service line can result in lead spikes and can place people at greater risk of exposure to lead for the short- and long-term](#). DC Water reports that the District has over 10,000 known intact lead service lines, over 10,000 known partial lead service lines, and a minimum of 15,000 service lines of unknown material.

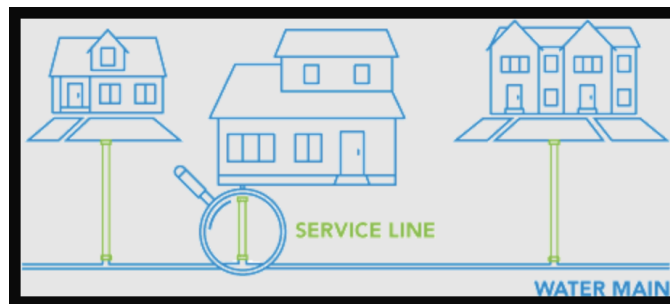


Image: [Denver Water](#)

## Does my water have lead in it? DC Water says they are in compliance with all federal regulations, so should I be concerned?

Yes. What DC Water’s compliance with federal regulations tells us is that, at this time, the District is not experiencing severe, citywide contamination, like it did during our city’s [historic lead-in-water crisis of 2001-2004](#). It does not tell us that tap water at individual buildings is free of dangerous lead. Advocates are in the middle of [asking EPA to update and clarify this confusing and inadequate regulatory scheme](#).

There is no safe level of lead in water.

[DC Water’s own testing at individual homes reveals that our taps continue to dispense lead at both low and high levels](#). Unfortunately, even taps that test at zero lead cannot be presumed safe, because lead leaching tends to occur erratically and unpredictably. A tap that tests at zero one time may test at hundreds and even thousands of parts per billion another time. [Lead in water has been associated with miscarriage, fetal death, and elevated blood lead levels in children](#). Although it can cause health harm to people of all

ages, it is most dangerous for fetuses, infants (especially when dependent on reconstituted formula), and young children.

### **I have a lead or unknown material pipe and I had my water tested, do I need to be concerned?**

Yes. If you have a lead service line, whether intact or partial, you are at risk of exposure to lead in water, no matter what your testing showed. Because [lead from plumbing tends to release erratically and unpredictably](#), [current predominant testing methods can routinely miss contamination](#). In other words, exposures can occur even if a one-time test measures at zero. Although lead service lines tend to be the most significant source of lead in water, all lead-bearing plumbing (e.g., meters, solder, brass fittings, goosenecks) can leach lead and result in chronic and acute exposures. If we removed lead pipes from the system, it would be easier to treat the water to prevent exposure from plumbing inside homes.

### **How did we get lead in our water?**

We got lead in our water because there is lead in our plumbing. Historically, in DC [new homes were required to be attached to the water distribution system and homeowners did not have a say in the materials of the pipes](#). Decades later, the lead pipes remain, and as there is lead in our plumbing, we are at risk of lead contamination, regardless of DC Water's compliance with federal lead-in-water regulations. Although lead service lines were banned in 1986 and the allowable lead content of other plumbing materials has been reduced over the years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [continues to allow the introduction of lead into new plumbing materials labeled "lead free"](#). In the District, tens of thousands of lead pipes remain even 20 years after we saw catastrophic spikes in lead.

### **How long have we known about lead in DC's drinking water?**

We have known about lead in DC's water going back at least to the mid-1980's. In 2001-2004, the District experienced the nation's most severe lead-in-water crisis to date. Since then, peer-reviewed scientific research has shown that DC's lead crisis resulted in over 800—and possibly up to 42,000—[cases of elevated blood lead levels in young children, and that the city's fetal death rate rose by 37 percent](#).

## **How much money would it take to replace all DC's lead service lines?**

Cost estimates vary, but the [American Water Works Association \(AWWA\)'s 2020 estimate](#) is of about \$5,200 per planned lead service line replacement. [EPA estimates](#) that it would cost about \$4,700 per line. If those estimates are even remotely correct, \$350 million would be sufficient to replace all lines in DC.

## **When my gas line leaks, Washington Gas takes care of the problem, why is a water pipe different?**

It shouldn't be different. Lead pipes are dangerous and a public health threat, not unlike a leaking gas line. Although there has been a trend for some utilities to claim that they cannot replace the whole pipe, [legal experts don't see it the same way](#). It is possible to replace all the lead pipes and treat them as they should be treated: as an integral part of the District's water distribution system and a public health issue. Everyone deserves access to clean water.

## **In other cities do regular residents have to pay for the replacement of their own pipes?**

The practice of requiring residents to pay for the replacement of lead service lines has varied from city to city across the country. Lansing, MI covered all of the costs many years ago. Some cities have recently moved toward covering all of the costs. Pittsburgh, PA and Newark, NJ, after first charging folks for some of the costs have moved to paying the full freight. It's time for DC Water, the Mayor and the DC City Council to put the health of DC ratepayers first and to make sure that folks without lots of disposable cash aren't stuck for decades more with toxic lead pipes because they are not able to afford to get them out. Safe and affordable water for all is a basic human right. Let's put an end to this environmental injustice once and for all and get the lead out.