

Lead Exposure and Infrastructure Reconstruction – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The United States [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) have developed resources for residents with questions about the health effects of lead and ways to mitigate lead in drinking water.

- **Is my water safe to drink?**

Residents at locations in the vicinity of recent infrastructure reconstruction projects that included partial LSL replacements or LSL disturbances may have been exposed to elevated levels of lead in their drinking water. Concerned residents should contact the Sewerage and Water Board (S&WB) at (504) 865-0420 to have their water quality tested.

- **Water quality testing in New Orleans has found that lead levels are below EPA action levels. Is there any reason why I should be concerned about the quality of New Orleans drinking water?**

Testing under the Lead and Copper Rule would not capture spikes in lead levels following the disturbance or partial replacement of LSLs because water quality testing for LCR compliance is conducted only on one sample from 80 New Orleans residences—out of 140,000 service connections—every three years.

- **Does my home have lead service lines?**

The S&WB does not have a complete and accurate inventory of the composition of pipes in its water distribution system. A 1992 AWWA survey estimated as high as 80 percent of the publicly-owned service lines in New Orleans were made of lead. Properties in older neighborhoods are more likely to have LSLs.

The publicly-owned portion of the service line is located underground and it is unlikely that residents would be able to determine whether it is made of lead. Residents may be able to determine whether the privately-owned portion of the service line is made of lead. The American Water Works Association (AWWA) recommends the following:

“Lead service lines are generally a dull gray color and are very soft. They can be identified easily by carefully scratching them with a key or a coin. If the pipe is made of lead, the area you’ve scratched will turn a bright silver color. Do not use a knife or other sharp instrument and take care not to puncture a hole in the pipe.” – AWWA, [Communicating About Lead Service Lines: A Guide for Water Systems Addressing Service Line Repair and Replacement](#).

Residents who are uncertain about the material composition of their service line can also contact a licensed plumber.

- **Who is responsible for replacing the service line from the property line to my home?**

In New Orleans the portion of the service line that runs under public property is the responsibility of the utility; the portion that runs under private property is the property owners’ responsibility. Property owners are responsible for the costs associated with replacing the privately-owned portion of lead service line. Estimates vary, but the cost of replacing the privately-owned portion of an LSL can run as high as several thousand dollars. The cost depends on variables that include length of the service line and any obstacles encountered during excavation and replacement, such as hard surfaces, landscaping, and/or other utility lines.

The OIG recommended that the S&WB actively seek ways to provide property owners with incentives for and assistance with replacing the privately-owned portion of LSLs.

- **Where has the City and S&WB performed work that included partial LSL replacements or disturbances?**

The most complete list of the City’s construction projects (completed, ongoing, and future) can be found here at <https://www.nola.gov/dpw/projects/all/>. The City’s RoadWork NOLA [website](#) also lists upcoming construction projects. Neither of these lists captures partial LSL replacements or LSL disturbances as a result of routine maintenance and repair work.

- **How long am I at risk for exposure to increased lead as a result of partial LSL replacement or LSL disturbance?**

According to the EPA Science Advisory Board, “the weight of the evidence indicates that [partial LSL replacement] often causes tap water [lead] levels to increase significantly for a period of days to weeks, or even several months.”

- **How do I flush my water lines to prevent lead from entering my home?**

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) recommends that residents take the following steps:

Flushing the service line before it connects to the property's interior plumbing helps prevent particulate lead from becoming trapped in the crevices and joints of household plumbing or snagged along the walls of rusty galvanized pipes. Particulate lead caught in the house's interior plumbing has the potential to be released at any time into the home's tap water.

Residents should flush the service line by turning on the water at high velocity at an exterior faucet connecting with or as close to the service line as possible. Then, "beginning in the lowest level of the home, [residents] should remove faucet aerators and fully open the cold water taps throughout the home, letting the water run for at least 30 minutes at the last tap. Then they should turn off each tap starting with the taps in the highest level of the home." (AWWA, [Communicating About Lead Service Lines: A Guide for Water Systems Addressing Service Line Repair and Replacement](#).)

- **Which water filter kits are effective at removing lead from drinking water?**

NSF International's website includes lists of [water pitcher kits](#) and [faucet-mounted filters](#) that are certified for lead reduction. Not all NSF/ANSI Standard 53 certified products filter for lead. Consumers should look for ***NSF/ANSI Standard 53 certification or higher and wording on the packaging that specifically states the product effectively filters for lead.*** The Water Quality Association (WQA) also certifies water treatment products. A list of WQA-certified water treatment products can be found [here](#).

Regardless of which filtration product is used, residents must maintain the device and replace filters in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.