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**OIG RECOMMENDS PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVE TO WARN THAT INFRASTRUCTURE
RECONSTRUCTION INCREASES RISK OF LEAD IN TAP WATER**

The New Orleans Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a [report](#) titled “Lead Exposure and Infrastructure Reconstruction” to inform city officials, Sewerage and Water Board (S&WB) managers, and the public of the health risk posed by \$2.4 billion of infrastructure projects covering 400 miles of streets.

Lead service lines (LSLs) supply water from the water main in the street to the property, and many of the Department of Public Works and S&WB projects involving the water supply infrastructure include the partial replacement of LSLs. Partial LSL replacement may elevate the risk of exposure to lead in drinking water for weeks or months. However, any infrastructure work that disturbs LSLs can also cause spikes in lead levels at the tap.

Lead is a dangerous neurotoxin and no level of lead exposure is deemed safe. LSLs are the main contributor of lead in drinking water at the tap. The S&WB does not have complete or accurate records of locations of LSLs and many older New Orleans homes may be serviced by LSLs.

S&WB and city contractors also routinely replace the portion of service lines owned by the S&WB (from the water main to the meter or property line). The privately-owned portion of the service line is left in place, even if it is made of lead, because property owners are legally responsible for that portion.

The OIG found that the City and S&WB have not alerted residents to or provided them with information to reduce the risk of increased exposure to lead in water caused by the partial replacement or disturbance of lead service lines. As a result, New Orleans residents located where infrastructure reconstruction projects occur may be – or may have been – unknowingly exposed to elevated levels of lead in drinking water.

To reduce the risk, the OIG recommended that the City and S&WB should develop and implement a strategic public health initiative to educate residents about the potential for increased lead exposure and take immediate steps to mitigate residents’ ongoing risk. Immediate steps should include:

- a thorough and persuasive risk communication plan;
- advance notification of pending infrastructure work;
- detailed instructions for flushing water service lines;
- distribution of water filter kits and refills certified to remove lead; and
- water quality testing post-LSL replacement or disturbance.

The OIG also found that the City and S&WB have not developed a long-term lead reduction strategy that includes encouraging and providing support for property owners to replace privately-owned portions of LSLs. The OIG recommended that the City and S&WB encourage residents to replace private LSLs and actively explore options that ease the financial burden.

“We are pleased that during their review of this report, the City and S&WB took steps to begin alerting New Orleans water consumers to the risk of lead exposure during infrastructure work,” stated Inspector General Ed Quatrevaux. “We urge them to mobilize resources quickly to protect citizens through the construction and to plan for a completely lead-free water system for the future health of all New Orleanians, especially its children.”

This report and the accompany publication “[In Brief](#)” are published on the website nolaig.gov.

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