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### Understanding Your Water Service Line Notification Letter

#### Why did I receive a letter about my service line?

New USEPA regulations require us to notify all customers served through a water service line made of lead, galvanized steel that is or was downstream of lead, or unknown materials. It is meant explain the health risks of lead exposure, share simple precautions that can be taken to minimize exposure, and where to find more information about lead safety.

The letter **does not** mean that lead is present in your drinking water. USEPA requires all public water systems to send this notification to customers annually starting this fall. New customers will also receive a copy when they begin service. You will continue to receive a copy of this letter each year until your service line material is confirmed to be non-lead or is replaced unless it is determined it does not have to be replaced.

#### Is my water safe to drink?

The Phenix City Utilities Department treats, tests, and distributes high-quality drinking water to you and the community. Water provided by PCU is lead-free when it leaves our treatment plants, and we do not know of any of our water mains (the large pipes that distribute water throughout the community) being made of lead. PCU manages water quality at our water treatment plant to help prevent corrosion throughout the system and in privately-owned service lines and plumbing.

We regularly test our water for lead and other contaminants in accordance with EPA standards. Our water consistently meets or exceeds all federal and state safety standards, and in all of our sampling, we have never had lead levels exceed the EPA's action level.

#### How can lead get into drinking water?

After water leaves the PCU water main, it may be exposed to lead as it flows through privately-owned water service lines and indoor plumbing and fixtures. PCU routinely tests water at multiple sites throughout the entire water distribution system to confirm the water meets all state and federal requirements, including lead and copper limits. However, like all public water systems across the United States right now, we are diligently working to find and remove all lead service lines that could pose any health risk to our community.

#### Are all homes at risk?

No. We are specifically concerned about water service lines made of lead, or galvanized steel pipe that may have been attached to a lead connector or 'gooseneck', which is a short flexible piece of lead pipe

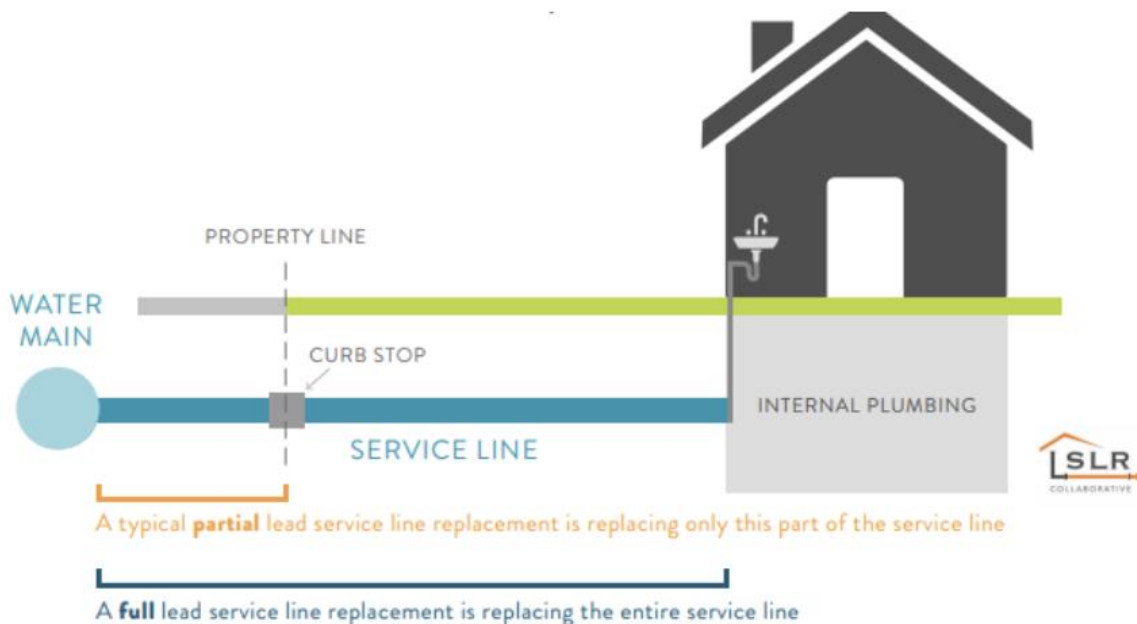


that was commonly used to connect service lines to water mains. Many homes and non-residential buildings we serve do not have these, but it is possible that some do.

### What exactly is a water service line?

The water service line is the pipe that connects a home or other types of buildings to the PCU-owned water distribution system. PCU water mains typically run underneath streets and alleys or off to the side in the public road right-of-way. The water mains feed individual service lines that run to a meter pit where the water meter is housed below ground. The service line then continues from the meter pit to the building and connects to the interior plumbing. Customer service lines are commonly made of copper, PVC or other types of plastic and galvanized steel and some could be lead.

The illustration below shows how a water service line connects individual customers to water mains and the list below it includes information about other potential sources of lead in the home.



- 1) Lead pipes and solder may be found inside homes and other structures built before 1989.
- 2) Your plumbing fixtures and faucets could contain small amounts of lead.
- 3) Other potential sources of lead in a home include lead-based paint, dust, soil, jewelry, ammunition, fishing tackle, old ceramics, and some plastics. It has also been found in imported cosmetics, spices and food products from poorly regulated countries.

### **Who owns and maintains water service lines?**

When a service line breaks between the meter and the building, it is the property-owner's responsibility to have it fixed or replaced. The property-owner owns the water service line all the way from the water meter to their building. PCU owns the meter pit, water meter and the water service line from the water main to the meter.

PCU maintains the section of service line that runs from the water main to the meter pit and will replace this part of the service line if it is found to be lead or galvanized steel connected to a lead gooseneck.

### **How can I find out if my service line contains lead?**

PCU is in the process of building an inventory of all water service lines connected to its system in accordance with new USEPA Lead and Copper rules. This includes researching historical records and conducting on-site investigations to confirm the presence or absence of lead.

PCU provides a [service line lookup tool](#) website for customers to check their service address to find out if the material has been identified. In many cases, the materials may be listed as 'Unknown', in which case PCU will continue its efforts over the next several years to determine the pipe material.

If you are anxious about having lead, especially if you live in an older home and your service line is 'Unknown', you may consider hiring your own plumber to complete an inspection. If you do this, please ask the plumber to contact us so that we can obtain a report to update our inventory.

### **If I have an Unknown service line, how will PCU figure out its material?**

If there are no records to indicate the material of your service line, it will be listed as 'Unknown', in which case PCU will continue its efforts over the next several years to determine the pipe material. This could include inspecting pipes where they can be accessed, or hydro-excavating small holes in the ground to be able to visually inspect the service line.

We need your help to help determine the material of your service line. If you know the material of your service line and/or the year your home or business was built or if it is possible to see the service line where it enters your building through a wall or crawl space, please either scan this QR Code to complete the Self Identification form, contact us at 1-800-674-7961 or go to the following website <https://120water.formstack.com/forms/phenixcityalnotices>. You will need the Location Id listed at the top of your notice in order to complete the Phenix City, AL Service Line Material Survey.



EPA has developed an online step-by-step guide to help people identify lead pipes in their homes called Protect Your Tap: A Quick Check for Lead. It is available for viewing at: <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/protect-your-tap-quick-check-lead>

### **Can I check for lead myself?**

You may be able to check the section of pipe that runs from the meter pit into your home or business. Look for the water pipe where it enters the building through the floor, a wall or a crawl space. Using a magnet and a metal tool you can scratch with, like a screwdriver or an old key, you can check for lead and galvanized steel yourself following the instructions below. If you are able to inspect and test the pipe, we recommend taking a photo, and please be sure to help us update our inventory using the QR code above. We really appreciate your help!

### **How to check for lead and galvanized steel pipe**

Find a magnet and an old key or tool to scratch the pipe where it enters the building. You may need a flashlight too.

If you can access the pipe where it enters the home or building, check to see if the magnet sticks to the pipe. If it does, the pipe is likely galvanized steel and is not lead. If the magnet doesn't stick, scratch the pipe if it is not obviously plastic or copper. Paint and grime may need to be scraped away to tell what is underneath. If you can identify the material, please share that with us! Go to <https://120water.formstack.com/forms/phenixcityalnotices> to report it using our simple online form.

### **How does PCU prevent lead contamination?**

We use Zinc Orthophosphate and Soda Ash as a corrosion inhibitor. Soda Ash controls the water's pH levels, reducing its corrosiveness. This process inhibits metals, such as lead, from leaching into the water from pipes. Our corrosion control program has proven to be highly effective in producing water that meets or exceeds the EPA and ADEM drinking water requirements.

### **What exactly does Soda Ash and Zinc Orthophosphate do to the water?**

Soda Ash increases the pH of the water, making it less acidic and less likely to dissolve metals like lead from pipes. By neutralizing the acidity, Zinc Orthophosphate creates a protective environment inside the pipes, significantly reducing the risk of lead entering the water.



### Can I have my water tested?

If you wish to test your water and learn more about the potential lead levels in your drinking water, we have a limited number of water testing kits available at no cost (subject to availability). However, it is important to understand that a negative test does not necessarily confirm your water service line is 'Non-Lead' because of treatment PCU provides to help prevent pipe corrosion. If you would like to request a testing kit, please either scan the QR code above, or go online to <https://120Water.formstack.com/forms/phenixcityalnotices> to fill out our online form, or call 1-800-674-7961.

### How do I protect myself from lead?

If you have a service line made of lead or galvanized steel requiring replacement, or if you want to take extra measure to protect yourself in the event you have any lead in your interior plumbing and fixtures, here are simple measures that can be taken to reduce your risk.

- **Replace plumbing materials containing lead and safely remove lead paint.** Contact us to let us know if you plan to replace your line. Also consider replacing brass faucets, fittings, and valves in your building plumbing that contain lead. If you believe you have lead paint, hire a professional to safely remove it.
- **Run the cold water to flush out lead.** The longer the water sits on leaded plumbing, the more lead it may contain. Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in the faucet has gone unused for more than six hours.
- **Use cold, flushed water for cooking and preparing baby formula.** Lead can dissolve into hot water more easily than cold water. **Note that boiling water does not remove lead.**
- **Remove and clean aerators/screens on plumbing fixtures.** Over time, lead sediment can collect in aerator screens. Remove and clean aerators screens at least twice a year by soaking the screen in vinegar and scrubbing it with a toothbrush.
- **Test your water for lead.** State-approved commercial labs provide water testing kits for lead. Like lead swabs, water testing may help you identify sources of lead in your building plumbing.
- **Get your child tested.** If you believe your child has been exposed to lead, contact your local health department or healthcare provider to find out how you can order a blood test.
- **Purchase a water filter.** Some water filters are designed to remove lead from your tap water. Read the package to be sure the filter is approved to reduce lead.

### If I learned that my service line is not lead, is there anything else I need to worry about?

Maybe. If you or a plumber checked the pipe entering your home or business, and it's not lead, your service line may be fine. This provides one point of inspection. USEPA recommends and in the future



may require water systems to inspect two points along each service line if there are no records to indicate the material. PCU may have to confirm the material of pipe that connects the meter pit to the water main. Check the [service line lookup tool](#) to find out if PCU has been able to identify your service line material from its records or a visual inspection. It's also possible your interior plumbing contains lead pipe, lead solder or older brass fixtures with some lead content.

**I am worried about other sources of lead in my home, or that someone may have been harmed by lead. What can I do?**

The following are other potential sources of lead:

- 1) Lead pipes and solder may be found inside homes and other structures built before 1989.
- 2) Your plumbing fixtures and faucets could contain small amounts of lead.
- 3) Other potential sources of lead in a home include lead-based paint, dust, soil, jewelry, ammunition, fishing tackle, old ceramics, and some plastics. It has also been found in imported cosmetics, spices and food products from poorly regulated countries.

Tips to reduce lead exposure in your home:

- a) Inspect your in-home water treatment devices, including water softeners and replace filters following manufacturer's recommendations. They may store and release lead into your water if not maintained properly.
- b) Filter your water. Use a water filter that is ANSI/NSF 53 certified for lead removal. Many filters and filter systems can improve water quality and taste in other ways too.
- c) Always use cold tap water for drinking and preparing food. Lead may settle and concentrate in hot water tanks. Hot water is more likely to dissolve lead from solder and brass fittings.
- d) Regularly clean faucet aerators. Aerators can collect particles from lead plumbing and should be removed and cleaned on a regular basis. It is especially important after household plumbing work and repairs. After removing the aerator, flush the cold-water lines for 5 minutes.
- e) Flush your tap for at least 5 minutes before drinking or cooking if the water in the faucet has gone unused for more than 6 hours. This will prevent consuming water that has sat exposed to any lead. If you have a known lead service line and your house is set far back from the street, you may need to flush longer. After flushing, use the water for cooking or drinking, or save it in pitchers.
- f) Install lead-free faucets and fixtures that are certified to contain no lead. Look for lead certification marks indicating the new product is lead-free, and then replace old faucets and fixtures. Visit [nepis.epa.gov](http://nepis.epa.gov) and search for lead-free certification for more information.
- g) Ensure other sources of lead in your home have been removed or properly managed. Consider having your home checked for paint made before 1978, and faucets installed before 1989. Test and remove (or restrict access to) other household items that could contain lead. Be wary of poorly regulated products from overseas, including plastics, beauty products and spices. Check the CDC website to learn about food and consumer products recalled for lead.

Additional Resources:

- Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program  
<https://alabamapublichealth.gov/aclppp>.
- National Lead Hotline you can call if you suspect someone in your household has been poisoned by lead, Ph. (800) 424-LEAD [5323].

**If PCU determines a home or business has a lead service line or galvanized line requiring replacement, will it be replaced?**

If you discover your water service line is made of lead or galvanized pipes which were downstream of lead pipes, replacement is the best course of action. Modern plumbing materials like copper, PVC, and PEX are safer and more durable. Replacing lead pipes and galvanized pipes which were downstream of lead pipes reduces the risk of lead exposure.

The owner of the building will be responsible for replacing the water service line from the meter to the building. PCU maintains the section of service line that runs from the water main to the meter pit and will replace this part of the service line if it is found to be lead or galvanized steel connected to a lead gooseneck. Depending on the number of service lines that may require replacement in our system, it may take several years to plan and complete this work. USEPA has proposed requiring all public water systems ensure these service lines are replaced no later than 2037.