COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

Remediation Options for Lead in School Drinking Water – Next Steps

Your facility needs to take action if drinking water sampling at your school or daycare facility finds a drinking water outlet has lead higher than the actionable limit established by EPA. Currently EPA determined that lead remediation levels in drinking water samples is 0.015 milligrams per liter. When a lead sample is detercted at or above this leve, facilitites should take immediate steps to address the source of lead to protect children and staff. Certain actions can take place to help reduce lead in drinking water. This is called remediation.

Remediation efforts can be temporary (short-term) or permanent (long-term). Some solutions can be implemented at low to no cost, while others may require additional cost. Many issues can be addressed by flushing, filtering, fixtures, and establishing routine practices.

Communication

Communication is very important in this process. Clearly communicating the testing results, policies, and expectations are critical. Post test results at the school or daycare facility and on a public website. Inform staff and parents of the results and actions that will be taken. Educate the students on any signage or changes in use for any outlets. For younger children, consider using pictures to convey a message.

Immediate Response

A few actions can immediately address lead issues in outlets with positive results. If the outlet that exceeded the limits is typically used for human ingestion, it could be shut off or disconnected. If the outlet is needed for other uses, mark it with a sign that says, “Do Not Drink” or “Not for Drinking or Cooking”. If the outlet is used for non-human ingestion, it could be designated “For Handwashing Only”.

Temporary (Short-Term) Measures

Short-term measures can be put into place as permanent measures are discussed. Short-term actions help mitigate the issues and sometimes become the permanent control measure. Flushing and filtering are two actions that can reduce or eliminate lead in drinking water.

It is recommended to flush outlets that tested above the actionable limit for lead. The flushing will allow water that has been sitting in the pipes to be rinsed out and replaced with fresh water. Test these outlets again to ensure lead levels remain low throughout the day and to verify the effectiveness of flushing. Flushing is different for each type of outlet, so it is important to follow a flush chart and receive proper training in lead prevention.

Point-of-Use (POU) filters can be effective in removing lead. The filters are placed on the outlet and remove lead as it exits the line. These filters can be placed in kitchens, water stations, and other outlets used for drinking or consuming the water. Depending on the style and type of filter, the cost can range from $50 to $500. Filters require routine maintenance and will need to be replaced at certain intervals to remain effective. (See image on next page)

Bottled water is an option if a school or daycare facility has widespread levels of lead. Bottled water is an expensive alternative but can be a short-term solution to allow time for other measures to be put into place.

Permanent Measures

The goal of permanent measures is to permanently reduce or eliminate lead in the school or daycare facility. There are many factors to consider when discussing these actions. This includes considering cost, the likelihood of success, staffing, and timing. The permanent measures usually have a higher associated cost, so budgeting is a key component during this process.

Based on the test results of the outlets, identify the areas of lead contamination and concern. The replacement of fixtures with lead-free plumbing can be a cost-effective option. Follow-up testing will need to be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the fixture replacements.

Filtered hydration and bottle fill stations can be installed throughout the school or daycare facility. POU filters on certain outlets are very effective in providing safe drinking water. Make sure the POU filters are certified lead-reducing filters and are properly maintained.

A larger undertaking would involve replacing some or all the lead pipes in a school or facility. Plumbing can also be reconfigured to bypass sources of lead contamination and provide a safe water supply to areas needed for drinking and cooking.

Routine Practices and Follow-up

Routine practices and scheduled maintenance need to be established as part of a safe drinking water plan in schools and daycare facilities. See “Establish Routine Practices” fact sheet. Follow-up testing needs to be conducted at intervals to ensure the measures that have been installed are working properly to reduce or eliminate lead in the drinking water. Record keeping is essential and should include the testing results, maintenance, schedules, and measures that have been approved and installed.