

Important Information about Your Drinking Water

Sterling Water Department Drinking Water May Contain Elevated Levels of Lead

This notice contains important information about your drinking water. Have someone translate it for you or speak with someone who understands it.

Our water system recently violated a drinking water requirement to install corrosion control treatment by **February 16, 2024**. Even though this is not an emergency, as our customers, you have a right to know what happened, what is being done to correct this situation, and what you should do.

What happened?

We routinely sample water at consumers' taps for lead and copper. The tests from **2019**, and again in **2021**, showed lead levels in the water above the limit, or "action level," as a result we are required to install corrosion control treatment. This treatment helps prevent lead in homeowner's pipes, solder, and fixtures from dissolving into the water. We hired an engineering firm to conduct a corrosion control study, which was completed in December 2021. The recommendation from the study was to add orthophosphate at both water treatment plants and to adjust the pH of the water using existing chemical feed systems at the plants. This approach was agreed with by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) in February 2022.

What is being done?

The Water Department has been working with MassDEP consistently since February 2022. Permitting challenges, additional testing required, and various other delays caused the project's schedule to be pushed out. Engineered designs were completed for the Town's two water treatment plants in September 2023. MassDEP approved these designs in December 2023. The deadline for installing corrosion control was **February 16, 2024**, but installation was not able to be completed by that deadline, creating this violation. We determined that an additional eight months would be needed to complete this project utilizing funds appropriated at the May 2024 Town meeting. The corrosion control treatment will be in place by **October 16, 2024**.

What should I do?

Listed below are some steps you can take to reduce your exposure to lead:

- Find out whether your pipes contain lead or lead solder. The use of lead/tin solder was banned from Massachusetts in 1986.
- Call us at the number below if you wish to find out more about sampling your home's water for lead. The DPW can provide you with guidance on sampling procedures and approved laboratories in the area to analyze the sample.
- Run your water for 15-30 seconds or until it becomes cold before using it for drinking or cooking. This flushes any standing lead from the pipes.
- Don't cook with or drink water from the hot water tap; lead dissolves more easily into hot water.
- **Do not boil your water to remove lead.** Excessive boiling water makes the lead more concentrated – the lead remains when the water evaporates.

What does this mean?

This is not an emergency. If it had been, you would have been notified **within 24 hours**. Typically, lead enters water supplies by leaching from lead or brass pipes and plumbing components inside buildings. New lead pipes and plumbing components containing lead are no longer allowed for this reason. However, many older homes may contain lead pipes. Your water is more likely to contain high lead levels if water pipes in or leading to your home are made of lead or contain lead solder.

Lead can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. Infants and children who drink water containing lead in excess of the action level could experience delays in their physical or mental development. Children could show slight deficits in attention span and learning abilities. Adults who drink this water over many years could develop kidney problems or high blood pressure.

This notice is being provided to you to make you aware of the violation, what the Town is doing to correct it, and what you can do to reduce your exposure to lead in the interim. This notice will continue to be provided to you every three months until this matter has been corrected. Results of tests for lead and copper after 2021 have shown lead levels below the action level and we will continue to monitor every six months and will notify you if levels are above the action level.

Where can I get additional information?

If you have questions about your water system's operation, water quality monitoring, or response to this issue, please contact the system operator directly. If you have questions about the drinking water regulations or health risks posed by this contaminant you can contact the MassDEP Drinking Water Program at: program.director-dwp@mass.gov or (617) 292-5770. If you have questions about specific symptoms, you can contact your doctor or other health care provider. If you have general questions about public health, you can contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 617-624-5757.

For more information, please contact the Water Department office at 978-422-6767, 171 Worcester Road, Sterling, MA 01564, or DPW@sterling-ma.gov.

Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

This notice is being sent to you by: Sterling Water Department - PWS ID#: 2282000

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