

## Service Line Map Launch and Lead Service Line Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### Lead Plumbing Basics

#### Is my water safe to drink?

**Yes, your water remains safe to drink, regardless of pipe material.** PWD treats drinking water to reduce corrosion (lead entering the water from plumbing). PWD routinely tests for lead at customer taps throughout Philadelphia. We make sure to test at homes that have lead service lines. These tests show that our treatment is protecting drinking water from corrosion.

While our treatment is proven to be effective, there are still steps you can take to reduce the risk of lead from plumbing. The easiest and most cost-effective solution is to flush your water whenever it hasn't been used for 6 hours or more. Flushing means running cold water for 3-5 minutes. You can learn more here: [water.phila.gov/lead](http://water.phila.gov/lead)

#### What are sources of lead?

If lead is found in water samples, it's coming from the property's plumbing – not from water sources.

Lead can be hidden in older plumbing work, including:

- Pipes
- Faucets
- Plumbing fixtures
- Solder and pipe fittings

Even some plumbing equipment previously labeled as “lead-free” could still contain small amounts of lead.

It's important to look at all sources to prevent exposure to lead. **Peeling paint and lead-dust are the most common sources of exposure. Other sources include soil, toys, glasses or dishware, jewelry, and other products.** Reducing exposure to lead can improve health outcomes, especially for children.

#### What are health effects of lead?

Over time, exposure to lead can cause serious health effects in all age groups. Infants and children can have decreases in IQ and attention span. Lead exposure can lead to new learning and behavior problems or exacerbate existing learning and behavior problems. The children of women who are exposed to lead before or during pregnancy can have an increased risk of these adverse health

effects. Adults can have increased risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney, or nervous system problems.

Philadelphia’s Department of Public Health recommends a blood test for lead for all children aged 1–6.

## Service Line Background

### What’s a service line? Who owns it?

A service line is the pipe that carries clean water into a property from one of the City’s water mains. The service line is a part of a property’s plumbing — even though it’s underground.

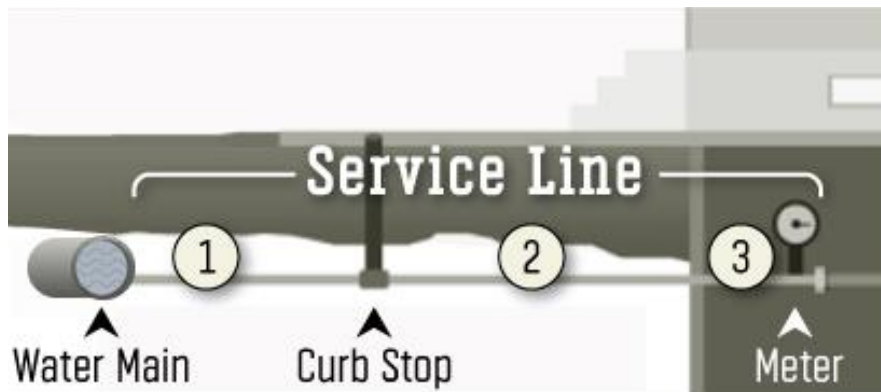
The property owner owns the entire service line. Residential service lines do **not** belong to the City.

### Why might the service line have different materials at different points?

In some cases, a section of the line was replaced in the property’s history. The remaining section could have been left intact. This is called a *partial service line replacement*. For this reason, we’re required to identify the material at three points in order to categorize an overall service line material.

### What 3 points do we use to categorize a service line?

- (1) Material between the main and curb stop
- (2) Material between the curb stop and meter
- (3) Material at meter



### **How are service line materials categorized?**

**Lead** was used in the past because it is soft and can be bent. Lead service line installation decreased after the 1950s.

**Galvanized steel or iron** pipes can corrode. Over decades, any lead from a property's plumbing can accumulate on the corroded walls of galvanized pipes.

**(Non-lead) Plastic** is typically a less expensive option. It is not associated with an increased risk of lead.

**(Non-lead) Copper** is used in most service line replacements. Copper service lines are considered safe, because they are not associated with increased health risks.

**Unknown:** Hundreds of thousands of properties in Philadelphia have an unknown material in a buried section of the service line. If the overall category for your line is "unknown," you should act as though it may contain lead. This guidance is a precaution for your health and safety.

### **My service line is listed as "unknown material." What should I do?**

First, check to see if your material is unknown **at the meter**. If it is, you can check the material and report it back to us. Reporting this point of information will help update our records. And if the line at the meter is lead, you are eligible for a zero-interest loan through HELP loan: [water.phila.gov/help](http://water.phila.gov/help)

Visit this page to report back to us: [water.phila.gov/service-line/](http://water.phila.gov/service-line/)

**If the unknown material is in a buried section of the service line**, checking the material would require hiring a private plumber. However, PWD does not recommend checking buried portions.

### **Why don't I need to check the buried portions?**

Regardless of the material, the next steps will be the same: flush, filter, or invest in replacement.

Customers do not need to invest in this plumbing work immediately. PWD plans to investigate unknown service lines, but it is going to take us time to get there. The department is exploring new technologies to determine the material of the buried portion of unknown lines in cost-effective and minimally disruptive ways.

### **What if I still want to proactively dig to determine the unknown material?**

You need to hire a licensed plumber. See a list of licensed contractors: [phila.gov/li](http://phila.gov/li). *Please note: Any work through a private plumber is at the customer's expense.*

### **Does PWD offer to check the buried service line materials?**

PWD doesn't currently offer to check buried service line materials. However, we do record service line materials through many of our routine operations and will update our records as we receive that information. We are exploring ways to identify the service line materials in a cost-effective and minimally disruptive way. Our goal is to reduce the number of service lines categorized as unknown over the coming years.

### **Will the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) dig at my house to determine the material of my currently "unknown" line?**

The service line is considered part of the property. It belongs to the house — not the city. Digging up properties across the city would be costly and disruptive for the city. However, we are investigating cost-effective and minimally disruptive ways to determine the material of unknown service lines.

### **Will the City come and replace a property's lead service line?**

The city currently provides two options for replacing lead service lines.

- 1) Zero interest loans. Learn more here: [water.phila.gov/help](https://water.phila.gov/help)
- 2) Replacement during scheduled water main replacement.

Review the options for a service line replacement for your property:

<https://water.phila.gov/lead/#replace>

If you don't want to take out a loan or wait for water main replacement on your block, you can hire a plumber to replace the line. If replacement isn't feasible, follow instructions for flushing.

We are working on a plan to replace all known lead service lines in Philadelphia by 2038. This is an ambitious plan that will require funding and the cooperation of property owners.

### **If the city can't dig up service lines to check unknown materials, what should we do?**

Our advice for houses with unknown service line material: Flush your pipes. Flushing is shown through scientific tests to reduce the chances of exposure to lead from your property. Even if you dig to determine this material, the actions would still be the same: flush, use a filter, or replace your line.

### **I don't want to flush or use a filter. I want to know for sure my unknown line is not lead. What should I do?**

You can hire a licensed plumber to determine your pipe material. If the pipe is made of lead, you have options for digging up and replacing your service line. Learn more about replacements:

[water.phila.gov/lead/#replace](https://water.phila.gov/lead/#replace)

## **You're telling me to run my water? Isn't that wasteful, and won't it drive up my water bills?**

Running your water for about 3-5 minutes a day will cost about 2 pennies per flush. Adding up, this will cost about \$1.20 per month and about \$15 per year. If you want to conserve water, flushing your toilet, running a washer, or taking a shower will also get rid of water that has been sitting in pipes.

## **Should I flush for 3 minutes or 5 minutes?**

The length of time to flush depends on how far your property is from the water main. If you live in a rowhome close to the street, 3 minutes is fine. We say "3-5 minutes" to account for some properties that are set farther back from the street.

## **Why won't the city reduce my water bill to account for the money it costs to flush?**

Your service line pipes are a part of your property. We are not responsible for the materials on your property. We did not install lead service lines. It may help to think of these pipes as similar to other plumbing parts, like faucets or hot water heaters.

## **New Service Line Map**

### **Why did we create this map?**

Lead service lines are a challenge across the country. Even though these lines don't belong to the City of Philadelphia, we are committed to supporting the removal of water service lines that contain lead. To meet this challenge, cities need to understand the number and location of these lines. The map and records will inform plans for future lead service line replacement efforts.

**It's the law:** We're required by Federal and State law to make this information available to the public. This law applies to every water utility in the United States. There is a national effort to remove lead service lines from all properties. Sharing this information is a key step in this important work.

### **Where did the records on the map come from?**

The information is compiled from multiple sources. Sources include historical records, field inspections, and permits. They also include material tests of one point of the service line during meter upgrades or conservation assistance.

**These records will be updated over time as we gather additional information.**

However, no materials identification method is 100% accurate.

Further work may be required to confirm and verify the materials at more points along a service line.

### **How do I find out what my service line is made of?**

Visit [water.phila.gov/service-line](https://water.phila.gov/service-line) and enter your address into the map search bar. Read the pop-up box for details about your property.

## **What can residents do?**

Recommendations are based on the way service lines are categorized. For lead, galvanized or unknown material, we recommend the following:

### **Flushing**

Residents can get rid of water sitting in plumbing by flushing their pipes. “Flushing” means running cold fast water from a tap.

Instructions: 1. Turn on your cold tap. Open it all the way. 2. Run cold water from the faucet for 3–5 minutes.

When to do it: If you haven’t used water for 6 hours or more — usually first thing in the morning when you wake up or when you come home after work or school.

### **Cleaning faucet screens**

Clean the faucet screens regularly. Aerators, also called faucet screens, can trap lead. Then, they can release lead like a tea bag in water over time. Disassemble and soak screens in vinegar. Then, scrub the screens with a toothbrush.

### **Using Filters**

Use filters certified for lead reduction. Only these filters will reduce lead. You must follow all instructions from the manufacturer. Look for filters that are certified for lead reduction by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF).

## **PWD estimates that only 5% of service lines are made of lead, but the majority of properties are listed as “unknown.” How do you explain the difference?**

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection requires that we verify the service line material at 3 different locations before we can say that a service line is “non-lead.” These verification points include the material between the main and the curb, between the curb and the meter, and at the meter. Since PWD has never owned the service lines, we have limited historical records regarding their material.

The majority of service lines are currently categorized as “unknown.” PWD recently checked materials at meters across the city as part of meter upgrade work. Even with this new information, we can't categorize a line as “non-lead” without records for buried portions. Digging up most of the city’s streets and sidewalks to check the buried section is costly and disruptive. PWD has been testing emerging technologies to help categorize more service lines. PWD’s goal is to reduce the number of unknowns over time.

While we do not have enough information to fully classify most service lines as “non-lead,” that does not mean that we don’t know anything about these lines. We have hundreds of thousands of material records for properties throughout the city. The rate at which we find lead service lines

through our various record sources continues to support an estimated total of 20,000-25,000 lead service lines. This amounts to approximately 5% of all service lines in the City of Philadelphia.

## **Previous & Ongoing Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) Lead Work**

### **Does PWD test for lead in drinking water at home taps?**

PWD will conduct free water quality tests for customers with concerns about lead or water quality. Get started here: [www.phila.gov/services/water-gas-utilities/get-your-water-tested/](http://www.phila.gov/services/water-gas-utilities/get-your-water-tested/)

In addition to regular tests in customer homes, we also perform rounds of sampling for lead to meet government regulations. Since June 1991, PWD has tested for lead levels in accordance with the federal Lead and Copper Rule.

We share these results with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the public.

Recent changes to the guidelines require more sampling and stricter limits. PWD has been planning for these changes for years, and we are prepared to meet these new requirements. **See the latest results in the new Water Quality Report: [water.phila.gov/wqr](http://water.phila.gov/wqr)**

### **What is corrosion control?**

Lead can dissolve from plumbing materials into water. This process is called corrosion. When water sits unused in lead or galvanized pipes for a period of 6 or more hours, the pipe can corrode or wear away. Lead service lines or lead solder can dissolve into the clean water we deliver to your property. Dissolved lead is not visible.

Philadelphia's treatment helps protect your pipes from corroding. Zinc Orthophosphate, added during treatment, forms a protective coating on the inside of pipes. For over 25 years, Philadelphia has successfully used this process to reduce the amount of lead that can dissolve from plumbing into water. However, different building plumbing systems and usage patterns can affect how well corrosion control works.

### **Does PWD remove lead lines?**

During planned water main construction, we offer to replace any lead service line from our water main to the customer's meter. This service is offered free of charge. PWD will notify residents by letter several months before work is scheduled to begin.

PWD also offers a zero-interest loan for customers interested in replacing a lead service line. Learn more information about how the Homeowner Emergency Loan Program (HELP) may be used to replace your lead service line: [water.phila.gov/help](http://water.phila.gov/help)

### **Does PWD send communications about lead to the public?**

Yes. We send email newsletters about lead, including tips for people with lead service lines or plumbing. Sign up: [water.phila.gov/lead-updates](http://water.phila.gov/lead-updates).

We also provide fact sheets and background information on lead as part of water main construction projects.

**What other work has been done?**

During recent meter upgrades, PWD checked the material of the service line near the meter. Contractors conducting the upgrades left information about lead service line materials. Learn more about recent meter upgrades: [water.phila.gov/ami](https://water.phila.gov/ami)

**Material verification efforts:** We have been using a variety of methods to verify records of service line materials. We've been visiting properties to visually inspect service line materials. Learn more about service line verification inspections: [water.phila.gov/lead/service-line-inspections/](https://water.phila.gov/lead/service-line-inspections/)

We're also testing emerging technologies to help categorize more service lines. Our goal is to reduce the number of unknowns over time.

**Testing water for lead at more schools and childcare facilities:** Philadelphia has been testing for lead in water at schools for years. See previous results from the School District of Philadelphia: [www.philasd.org/capitalprograms/environmental/water-testing-archives/](https://www.philasd.org/capitalprograms/environmental/water-testing-archives/)

Our new testing program makes more facilities eligible for free sampling, including daycares, charter schools, and private schools: [water.phila.gov/lead/school-childcare/](https://water.phila.gov/lead/school-childcare/)

**Any more questions?**

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