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City of Duluth Communications Office

Mayor Emily Larson
411 West First Street • Duluth, Minnesota 55802 • www.duluthmn.gov

*For more information contact Kate Van Daele,
Public Information Officer at 218-730-5309*

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SUBJECT: City of Duluth provides update on lead testing results

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

City of Duluth provides update on lead testing results

[Duluth, MN] In April, the City of Duluth asked for 100 volunteers to have their water tested for lead. To be eligible, homeowners or renters needed to be living in a single-family home that was built before 1930. The City had an overwhelming response and tested 102 sites throughout the City. On Friday, June 18, staff received the results from a contracted lab and learned that the results tested higher for lead than originally expected.

Lead lines were installed throughout the City until 1929. The City of Duluth has been replacing these lines for the last 20+ years as a part of street renovation projects. City staff estimate that the City has approximately 5,000 publicly owned lead service lines left to replace. The number of privately-owned lead service lines is not known at this time.

“Generally, the City conducts a small sample of water tests every three years to comply with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requirements,” Jim Benning, Director of Public Works and Utilities, said. “With the EPA’s change in regulation that is coming in 2024, we wanted to expand our sample to see where levels were at ahead of this new standard. The information from this sample is invaluable and will help us to create a plan that complies with the EPA while educating the public on ways to mitigate lead within their homes.”

On Monday, June 21, those who participated in the study received their test results. Staff communicated that there was a range of lead amounts found in the 102 locations. While commonalities were looked for, specific neighborhoods did not have higher amounts than others; rather, locations that were located on a dead-end had higher lead results than locations that were located in denser areas.

The current EPA limit for lead is 15 µg/L. The upcoming regulation change will add a “Trigger Level” of 10 µg/L. In the tests that were completed, there were 30 samples that were above 15 ppb and 49 that were above ten ppb.

Yesterday, staff sent an email to those who participated in the study to share the results. The language was provided that no level of lead is considered to be 100% safe to drink and that flushing the system by running the faucet for a few minutes can be an effective way to reduce exposure, in addition to buying a filter or replacing the private service line.

“It is important to note that our water quality has not changed; the way the EPA looks for lead in the drinking water has changed,” Benning said. “The City of Duluth is still in compliance with EPA regulations. Staff are already planning our next steps to address the problem of lead in drinking water and creating a plan to mitigate and continue replacing public lead service pipes throughout Duluth.”

City staff are already working on ways to encourage and educate the public on flushing their water system if they live in single-family homes built before 1930. Comfort Systems is working on a system and methodology to credit home for excess water used for lead flushing. In addition to this, staff will be retesting several of the homes tested in April to get a better idea of levels found at each location.

The City of Duluth has applied and will continue to look for funding sources to replace publicly-owned lead lines throughout the City. Mayor Emily Larson has also been in touch with our state and federal delegation regarding this matter.

The City encourages those who are living in single-family homes that have been built before 1930 to flush their water system by turning on their water for three minutes before drinking. Water filters have been very successful in mitigating lead exposure.

A list of filters and ways to mitigate lead can be found on the City’s website at the following link <https://duluthmn.gov/public-works-utilities/utilities/water/lead-water-education/>.

The City is asking for the public’s help in identifying if they have a private lead service line. For instructions on how to determine if you have a lead service line, please visit the following link for a step by step process <https://apps.npr.org/find-lead-pipes-in-your-home/en/#intro> or call City of Duluth Engineering Department at 218-730-5200. Residents can report if they have a lead line by using the form found here: <https://duluthmn.gov/public-works-utilities/utilities/water/lead-water-education/>.

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