

Wilkesburg Penn Joint Water Authority Board Meeting

October 22, 2019

Good evening. I am Talor Musil, health policy coordinator at Women for a Healthy Environment, a nonprofit that focuses on environmental exposures that impact public health. Since 2009, our organization has been focused on preventing lead poisoning through community programming, technical assistance and advocacy.

As you may know, lead is a neurotoxin. It can impact many organs and systems in the human body, including brain development, hearing and speech delays, anemia, and kidney function. Lead is also harmful to expectant mothers and their growing fetus. The American Academy of Pediatrics indicates there is no safe amount of lead exposure from any source, including water. In addition, lead exposure causes hypertension and cardiovascular disease in adults.

We identified evidence that the Lead Industry Association was actively promoting the installation of lead service lines and developing plumber apprenticeship programs across the region in the 1930s. The vocational training organized in Pittsburgh and other cities in the 1930s raised a generation of plumbers to install and repair lead piping during the period 1931 – 1960, when 153,000 housing units were built across the city.

We know lead pipes exist in our communities and we must do everything within our power to prevent children from being exposed to lead from all sources, including water. In Wilkesburg alone (and we know your service area is much wider), between 2015 – 2017 over 70 children in the borough were identified with lead poisoning.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, partial lead service line replacement has been associated with short-term increases in lead levels in drinking water and has not been found to decrease risk for blood lead levels in children. And studies now show long-term results as well.

A scientific study was published in the Environmental Science Technology on June 23, 2016 entitled *Evaluating the Effects of Full and Partial Lead Service Line Replacement on Lead Levels in Drinking Water*, which concluded that “partial lead service line replacement more than doubled premises plumbing (L1, L2) lead

release in the short term and did not reduce L1, L2 lead release in the long term. Even 6 months after partial LSLR, 27% of first-draw lead levels were greater than  $15 \mu\text{g L}^{-1}$  (the U.S. EPA action level), compared with 13% pre-replacement.”

And in that same journal, on August 9, 2017 a study was published called *Short- and Long-Term Lead Release after Partial Lead Service Line Replacements in a Metropolitan Water Distribution System*. This research demonstrated that “61% of PLSLR samples still exceeded  $10 \mu\text{g/L}$ , reflecting the importance of implementing full LSL replacement and efficient risk communication.”

We were recently informed of the dozens of partial lead service line replacements conducted by the Wilkesburg Penn-Joint Water Authority each year. Not only must everyone have access to safe drinking water, the science informs us that these partial line replacements significantly increase the likelihood of exposure to lead in drinking water, a public health concern.

Water authorities across the country have committed to full service line replacements (meaning customer-owned lead service lines), including the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority and York Water Company in Pennsylvania, as well as a dozen other cities across the country.

We are asking the Wilkesburg Penn-Joint Water Authority to commit to the same. Place a moratorium on partial lead service line replacements and protect residents’ health. Lastly, we would urge the authority to offer free services to any household that requests lead in drinking water testing. If the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority can meet this request, so should Wilkesburg Penn-Joint. These actions, both the moratorium on partial lines and lead testing, meet your mission to serve and promote the general welfare of those who drink our water. As stated in your director’s message on your website “We as providers of drinking water, have burden of responsibility more acute than many other organizations. We are charged with the responsibility to gather, process, protect and nurture a basic necessity of life.”

Women for a Healthy Environment  
5877 Commerce Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
412-404-2872