



Media Release

Portland Water Bureau

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For more information, contact Public Information Officer Brandon Zero:

brandon.zero@portlandoregon.gov or call or text 503-823-8064.

Portland Water Bureau treatment investments significantly improve lead levels in water

Improved drinking water treatment benefits all, especially people in homes with lead plumbing

The Portland Water Bureau's latest investment in drinking water treatment is significantly reducing lead in drinking water, recent regulator-reviewed data show.

In 2022, the bureau implemented [Improved Corrosion Control Treatment](#). After multiple rounds of testing, the Oregon Health Authority has confirmed that the bureau's corrosion control treatment for lead is "optimized," bringing the Water Bureau in full compliance with the [Environmental Protection Agency's Lead and Copper Rule](#). We can now say with confidence that this \$20.6 million investment is producing results that benefit the region.

"This is the realization of years of work and important investments to reduce our community's risk associated with lead in home plumbing," said Water Bureau Director Gabriel Solmer. "The test results show us that those investments are paying off."

For most Portlanders, the risk of experiencing lead in their drinking water was already low. Unlike other places in the country, Portland never used lead service lines and worked to remove potential sources of lead from the drinking water system. All known [lead service connectors were removed from the water system](#) by 1998.

However, a small number of homes in our community have lead in their home plumbing. In Portland, lead in drinking water is mainly from the corrosion of lead in home and building

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plumbing materials, such as copper pipes with lead solder (most commonly used between 1970 and 1985) and brass components and faucets installed before 2014.

Background

Portland has treated the drinking water to reduce lead levels since 1998, but the most recent treatment upgrade to address lead in drinking water came in 2022. The Water Bureau worked with experts in the drinking water industry to design and install [improved corrosion control treatment](#). By increasing the water's pH and alkalinity, the improved treatment reduces corrosion of home and building plumbing, which better protects our water from lead in plumbing materials.

The new treatment was brought online in April 2022. As our improved corrosion control measures ramped up, we saw lower lead-in-water levels from our test sites. Our most recent test results from homes with lead in plumbing were 6.1 and 7.7 parts per billion (ppb), well below the federal action level of 15 ppb.

By upgrading drinking water treatment to reduce corrosion, the Water Bureau has taken a significant step toward reducing lead levels in drinking water for all users, especially for those with lead-soldered pipes or lead-containing components in their homes.

"This result really validates the investments we've made in the water system to protect the community," Solmer said. "Every time ratepayers pay their bills, they are funding efforts like this one to keep our drinking water safe."

Work continues to inform the community about the risks of lead:

- The bureau will continue to perform regular lead testing and inform folks of ways to protect themselves and their families.
- The Water Bureau will continue to offer free lead-in-water testing through the Leadline at leadline.org.
- There are many other ways that people can be exposed to lead, including lead paint. [Leadline.org](https://leadline.org) offers a wealth of information in multiple languages. Everyone, especially people with infants and young children, should learn about these risks so they can take simple steps to reduce exposure.

About the Portland Water Bureau

The Portland Water Bureau serves water to almost a million people in the Portland area. Portland's water system includes two great water sources, 54 tanks and reservoirs, and 2,250 miles of pipes. With 600 employees working on everything from water treatment to customer service, the Water Bureau is committed to serving excellent water every minute of every day.