

## **Lead Service Line Replacement FAQs for Communities**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provides an unprecedented level of funding for the replacement of lead service lines, the largest source of lead in drinking water and a serious threat to children's health.

Young children, infants, and fetuses are particularly vulnerable to lead in drinking water. Exposure of children to even low levels can damage the central nervous system; cause learning disabilities, shorter stature, and impaired hearing; and affect the formation and function of blood cells. These health effects can have life-long impacts on the ability of children to learn and thrive.

The following **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** are designed to help communities with lead service lines understand all the steps in the process leading to the replacement of their lines. With that understanding, communities can monitor the process and ensure that their needs are being identified and addressed. They can also help EPA track and report the total funds allocated to disadvantaged communities for projects that support the reduction of lead in drinking water.

### **HOW LEAD GETS INTO DRINKING WATER**

In communities with municipal water supplies, local water utilities deliver drinking water to homes and businesses through water mains under the streets. The water mains connect to lead service lines, pipes that run from property lines to internal building pipes that carry water to faucets, shower heads, and toilets. Lead can enter drinking water when pipes, faucets, and fixtures that contain lead corrode, especially when the water has high acidity or low mineral content. Lead pipes are more likely to be found in older cities and homes built before 1986. EPA estimates that there are between 6 to 10 million lead service lines in the country.

### **FUNDING AND INFORMATION ON LEAD SERVICE LINE REPLACEMENT PROJECTS**

The BIL provides \$15B of funding to advance the goal of removing 100% of lead service lines in the U.S. The funding goes to most states in Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (DWSRF) over a 5-year period (2022 to 2026). The BIL provides another \$11.7B in DWSRF over that same period to fund any eligible drinking water project, including lead service line replacements. Congress provided this unprecedented funding because it recognized the extent of the problem and that there is no safe level of exposure to lead. The law requires that 49% of both pots of funding be issued as grants or forgivable loans to disadvantaged communities and that the funds be used to replace lead service lines on both public and private property in order to discourage partial lead service line replacements. States are responsible for allocating these funds to communities except in Wyoming and Washington D.C., where EPA is responsible.

***Are funds available to assist tribes with lead service line replacements?***

A portion of the drinking water funding will be set aside by EPA to make direct grants for capital improvements to public water systems that serve tribes. Both community and non-profit non-community water systems serving tribal members are eligible for these grants. Community water systems provide water all year long to at least 25 people in primary residences, while non-community water systems provide water to non-residential locations such as hotels, office buildings, schools, and hospitals. The EPA Regions work with the Indian Health Service and tribes to identify, prioritize, and select projects to receive funding under the [Drinking Water Infrastructure Grants Tribal Set-Aside Program](#). (For more information on lead, visit <https://www.epa.gov/lead>.)

***What are the best practices to follow in developing a lead service line replacement project?***

In January 2023, EPA announced a new Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerators Community Initiative. EPA, in partnership with the Department of Labor and four states (Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Wisconsin), will work with 40 communities in 2023 to develop best practices and creative approaches on conducting inventories to identify lead pipes, developing lead service line replacement plans, increasing community outreach and education, and preparing applications for BIL funding. Communities should check EPA's [Water Technical Assistance website](#) regularly to get updates on best practices derived from this initiative.

**STEPS IN LEAD SERVICE LINE REPLACEMENT PROJECTS**

***Does my community have lead service lines?***

Your community drinking water system should know if lead service lines are present or suspected in the system. The water system must verify where all lead service lines are located and provide a publicly available inventory of their location. EPA's current Lead and Copper Rule requires water systems to provide an inventory by October 2024. Community water systems should consult EPA's [guidance manual for developing and maintaining a service line inventory](#).

Water systems should also access the tools and resources provided by the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA) as a supplement to the EPA guidance. In 2022, ASDWA published the "[State Implementation Framework for the Lead Service Line Inventory Requirements under EPA's Lead and Copper Rule Revisions](#)," which recommends data sources, lead service line inventory templates, and legal support to produce high quality inventories.

EPA recommends that states use their DWSRF allocation to proactively identify and provide assistance to rural, small and tribal drinking water systems, particularly systems in disadvantaged communities. These funds can be used to identify lead service lines, develop projects, apply for funding, design and implement projects, and build capacity in small drinking water systems.

### ***How can a community speed up identification of its lead service lines?***

To help water systems meet their obligations to maintain inventories of lead service lines, communities can organize public water system customers to self-identify their lead service lines. EPA has a “[Protect Your Tap: Quick Check for Lead](#)” guide that explains how to identify a lead service line using a quick scratch test on the pipe near the water meter. If there is a lead pipe entering the house, it means there is a lead service line that needs to be replaced. But lead pipes may be outside when the inside pipes are not lead. [This guide](#) provides information on how to find out if there is a lead service line at an individual property. Renters should ask landlords to provide information on the material used for service lines. Communities can also apply for EPA funds to support them in the development of lead service line identification technologies. EPA will make \$25M available over the next five years for this purpose.

### ***How does a community apply for a lead service line replacement project?***

Communities with lead service lines should contact the state drinking water authority as early as possible and request access to DWSRF funds to develop projects and apply for funding. Communities should also contact their regional EPA office for assistance, and tribes should contact the EPA regional Infrastructure Grant Tribal Set-Aside Coordinator. Communities should be aware that drinking water funds are available for obligation to the states over a two year period (the fiscal year in which they are appropriated and the following fiscal year).

The [Lead Service Line Replacement Collaborative](#) has prepared guidance materials to help communities plan for equitable lead service line replacement projects. The collaborative is a joint effort of national public health, water utility, environmental, labor, consumer, housing, and state and local government organizations focused on accelerating the full removal of lead pipes. Communities should also follow EPA’s new Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerator projects, which are developing best practices to overcome the barriers disadvantaged communities face in replacing lead service lines.

To receive funds, the community water system must submit an application to the state for a lead service line replacement project. Each state provides the application form and designs and manages the process for public water systems to apply for funds. EPA recently asked states to review their application processes and look for ways to simplify and streamline them. All applicants must propose projects that replace the entire lead service line (public and private side), not just a portion, unless a portion has already been replaced. The applicant must also commit to funding the entire replacement for both public and private lead service lines. Water systems often will not do lead service line replacement in a neighborhood unless they can also do water main replacement at the same time. Where resources are not adequate to fund both the main line and the neighborhood line replacements, communities should ask their water systems to prioritize neighborhood line replacement and not require main line replacement if water main leaks or breaks are not posing a health hazard.

### ***How can communities influence a state's decision to fund their projects?***

In order to get EPA's approval of a grant award and release of funds, each state must submit: 1) an Intended Use Plan (IUP) that describes how the state will use that year's drinking water funds; and 2) a Project Priority List that ranks individual projects by their assigned priority and describes the expected terms of financial assistance and size of the community served. The IUP must provide sufficient information on the priority system for the public to understand the criteria used for ranking individual projects. EPA's guidance states that the priority ranking should address the most serious risks to public health, ensure compliance, and assist systems most in need based on the state's definition of a disadvantaged community. After a community water system has submitted an application, the water system should ask the state when the project will be reviewed and ranked. Many states have an "intent to apply" form that can help initiate conversations with the state to improve applications and fundability.

Communities should make sure they review the state's draft IUP and document any concerns they have regarding the priority system or the state's definition of disadvantaged community. There is typically a public comment period when comments can be submitted regarding each IUP. Priority points may need to be shifted away from ranking criteria unrelated to disadvantaged communities in order to ensure that 49% of the lead service line replacement funds go to these communities. The state's definition of a disadvantaged community may also need to be modified, especially if it is based solely on population.

## **IMPORTANT HEALTH PROTECTIONS**

### ***What do communities need to do to protect their health during lead service line replacements?***

When lead service line replacement is underway, lead concentrations in tap water can spike for weeks. Residents should take the following actions during this period:

- Before water is used in the home following a lead service line replacement, remove faucet screens, run all cold water faucets for 30 minutes, and clean and reinstall faucet screens. This process can be repeated monthly to flush lead particles out of the household plumbing for six months.
- Use certified lead reducing filters for six months following replacement (and any time a lead service line is disconnected from the water main).
- Check to see if all excavations are closed/covered overnight; ideally no excavation should be left open overnight.
- Request temporary and permanent sidewalks and street paving that do not contribute to pedestrian and driving hazards.

### ***What can communities do to ensure residents have access to safe water?***

Your community water system is responsible for monitoring a sample of its customer's water to determine if lead exceeds the current regulation's action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb), and for adding corrosion control treatment if needed to keep lead lower than this. The water system must

notify the customer if samples collected in their home exceed 15 ppb or if the community water samples exceed the lead action level. It should be noted that this action level of 15 ppb is not a health protective level; it is a trigger for corrosion control treatment. Whether tap water in your community is or is not below the action level, families can reduce lead exposures by taking the following steps:

- Provide infants with pre-mixed formula or reconstituted formula mixed with bottled or filtered tap water.
- Use lead reducing filters that meet NSF 53 for lead reduction at all homes with confirmed lead service lines until the lines are replaced. These filters are certified to reduce lead to less than 5 ppb but frequently bring lead down to non-detectable levels.

*These FAQs were compiled by Betsy Southerland, former Director of Science and Technology in EPA's Office of Water, and Elin Betanzo, Founder, [Safe Water Engineering, LLC](#).*