

Lead Water Service Pipe

The water pipe that runs underground from the city's main pipe to your home is called the service pipe or house water main. In most areas the home owner owns, and is responsible for, all or part of this pipe. If your home was built before 1950, and this service pipe has never been upgraded, it may be made of lead. Most lead pipes, however, have long since been replaced with modern copper pipes. Pillar To Post inspectors still come across lead water mains in older homes from time to time.

Recognizing a Lead Service Pipe

It may be possible for you to check your service pipe yourself if you can see a few inches of it inside your home. Most of it is buried in the ground. Lead service pipes are a dull gray color. It is distinctly different from copper or plastic but it might look like galvanized steel.

This won't fool you for long if you have a magnet. A magnet will stick to galvanized steel but not to lead. Of course if the water main is galvanized steel, it will need replacing anyway but that is another topic.

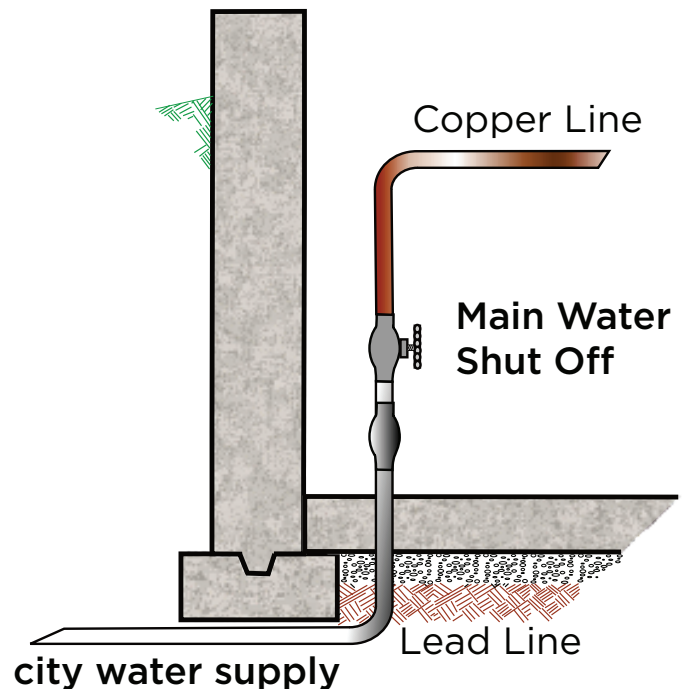
The other identifying characteristic of a lead service pipe is the joint that is formed where it attaches to the distribution piping in the home. This joint looks like a ball or bulb of lead.

What Should You Do?

If your home has a lead water main, don't panic. Although the toxicity of lead is a concern, a layer of oxide inside the pipe protects the water supply to a certain extent. Furthermore, significant lead exposure is not something that happens overnight. You can avoid unnecessary exposure with a few simple tips. For instance, let your tap run for a few minutes, or until the water runs cold, when getting water for drinking or cooking. This procedure flushes stagnant water from the pipes. This is good practice no matter what type of pipes you have.

Lead Based Solder

Copper distribution piping inside the home is joined with solder. Solder used in the past (prior to about 1980) had about 50% lead in it. The tiny amount of solder surface area that makes contact with the water in the pipes is probably not significant, in most cases. However, some water chemistries



could dissolve more lead, making stagnant water potentially hazardous. Either way, you should avoid drinking stagnant water from these pipes. You can have the solder tested by an expert if you would like to find out for sure.

Today, solder for fresh water distribution piping does not have lead in it.

Tips

- Remove and clean aerator in tap periodically.
- A water test can identify lead levels in your water.
- If you are concerned that you have been exposed to lead, a doctor can administer a simple blood test that can identify lead in your body.

Now that you have a protocol for your drinking water, and some smart tips at your disposal, you may wish to call a plumber for a quote on replacing the water main. Make sure you check with the city first, as they may be offering a subsidy or program for water main replacement.

Lead Pipe Joint

