Lead and Copper Rule Changes: *For the Future*

By Chuck Mischel, ND Rural Water

Lead contamination has been around for about 5,000 years when plumbing was just in its infancy. The ancient Romans commonly used lead in plumbing and in the manufacturing of plates, cups and as a preservative in such things as wine as early as 2,000 years ago. The use of lead undoubtedly made lead poisoning a very real and common health concern.

Lead is great for certain things, but the exposure does have severe consequences to our health. The Lead and Copper Rule was created by the EPA in 1991 to address the issues of lead and copper in our drinking water. It is not necessarily from our actual water sources or water treatment facilities; it is primarily a result of materials used in the distribution system and residential plumbing serving the consumers. Both metals enter the drinking water similarly, by leeching or absorbing into the water, therefore they have been regulated under one rule.

The Lead and Copper Rule has been very effective in reducing the exposure of these metals throughout the United States. One of the main reasons for the rule is to protect our future generations, including our children right now. There was never a testing component for water in schools and childcare facilities. With the new regulations, public water systems are required to test the water from these institutions periodically.

Typically, in North Dakota, lead and copper sampling is done every three years, which is dependent on the sample results derived from initial monitoring. For the most part, lead and copper levels in the state are far below the maximum contaminant levels established by the EPA years ago.

The maximum contaminant action level for lead is 15 parts per billion and 1.3 parts per million for copper samples. If the maximum contaminant levels were to be exceeded, further follow up testing would be administered to see if it is in fact above the applicable limits. If so, increased monitoring would be implemented along with a corrosion control plan to be put into place effective immediately.

The presence of lead in drinking water is complex and requires action at many different levels, from educating consumers to those who treat and disinfect the water we drink and the regulatory guidelines as well. Lead has been around for a very long time, but we have the tools, general knowledge and science to combat these issues to continue providing clean, safe drinking water for everyone.

The Class of 2021 is looking forward to the future, and for many, the future looks bright. While many new graduates are preparing to leave for colleges across the country, there's plenty who are getting paid to learn their chosen occupation.

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven model of apprenticeship that is validated by the U.S. Department of Labor. North Dakota Rural Water Systems is excited to be rolling out its own Registered Apprenticeship Program.

Over the next decade, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of the workforce to retirement. Many of these employees have worked at the same utility for the majority of their careers and will depart with decades of valuable institutional knowledge.

If you are looking for a stable, promising career where you will be able to serve your community and make a difference in everyday lives while learning from some of the best water and wastewater operators in the nation, apply to become an apprentice in the water and wastewater industry. There always will be a need for water and wastewater professionals and there is no better time than now to become the next generation of respected professionals in the most vital industry in the world: water.

For more information, visit NDRW.org

> "Knowledgeable employees are critical to water utilities. This apprenticeship program provides a structured path to begin a successful career in the industry."
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> – Eric Volk, executive director, NDRW

Why Apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction and a portable, nationally recognized credential.

PAID JOB Apprenticeships are jobs! Get paid to learn throughout your apprenticeship with a guaranteed wage increase as you develop new skills.

CLASSROOM LEARNING Most apprenticeship opportunities include classroom instruction and often provide college credit for your experience while allowing you to avoid student debt.

CREDENTIALS Earn a portable, nationally recognized credentials within your industry.

WORK-BASED LEARNING Gain structured on-the-job learning to prepare for a successful career.

MENTORSHIP Gain workplace-relevant skills in the field of your choice through on-the-job learning and under the supervision of an experienced mentor.

Source US Dept. of Labor