



American Water Works Association

Lead Communications Guide and Toolkit

An opportunity to strengthen public trust



Only time the community sees or hears from us cannot be when something breaks, there's a crisis or we need money.



Consistent, authentic & proactive communication builds trust

Business Case for Communicating About Lead



Partnerships

Positive partnerships with schools, daycares, and healthcare agencies that reinforce your messages.



Operations

Property owners more willing to work with your utility and act on their side of the water service line.



Trust

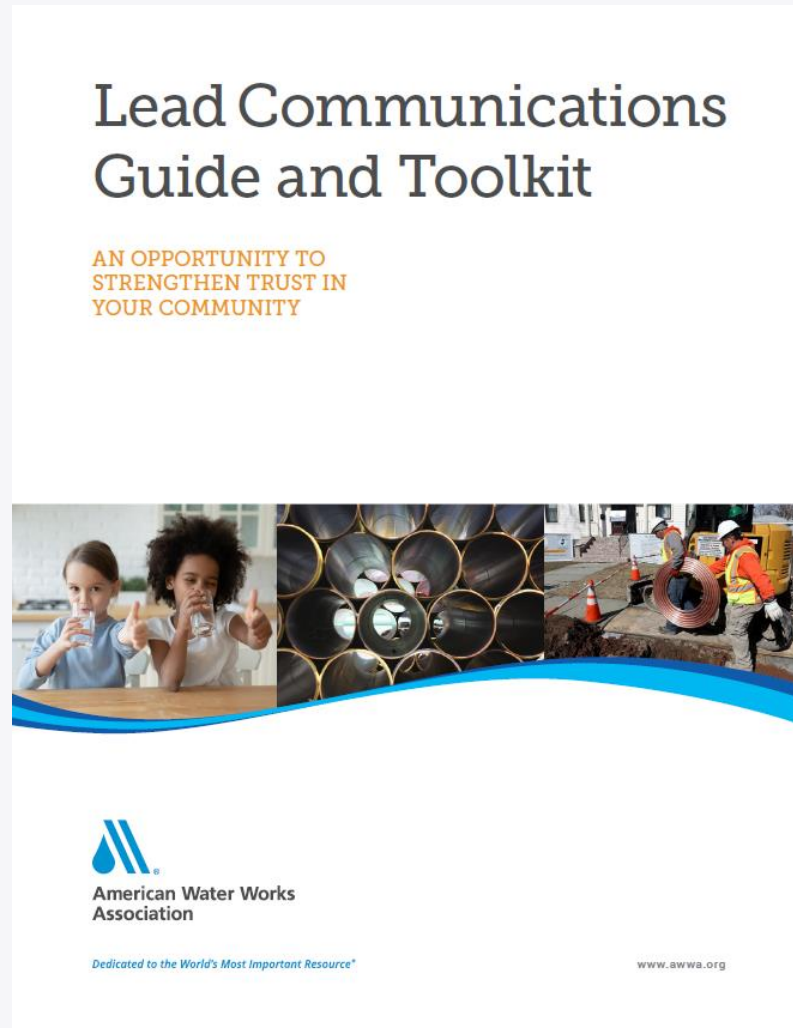
Customers, stakeholders, and the media who take time to listen and understand the issue.



Support

Board members, elected officials, and voters are more likely to support your utility and financing.

Lead Communications Guide and Toolkit



Guide

Requirements, best practices, and examples from leading utilities



Videos

Learn from industry leaders



Adaptable Tools

FAQs, brochure, and annual outreach letters

Starting with a story and tools



Talking about drinking water

Communication tools to help first tell the story of how a utility produces and delivers drinking water.



Service Line Inventory

Sample communication and best practices for visualizing inventory



Schools, Child Care Facilities, Public Health Agencies

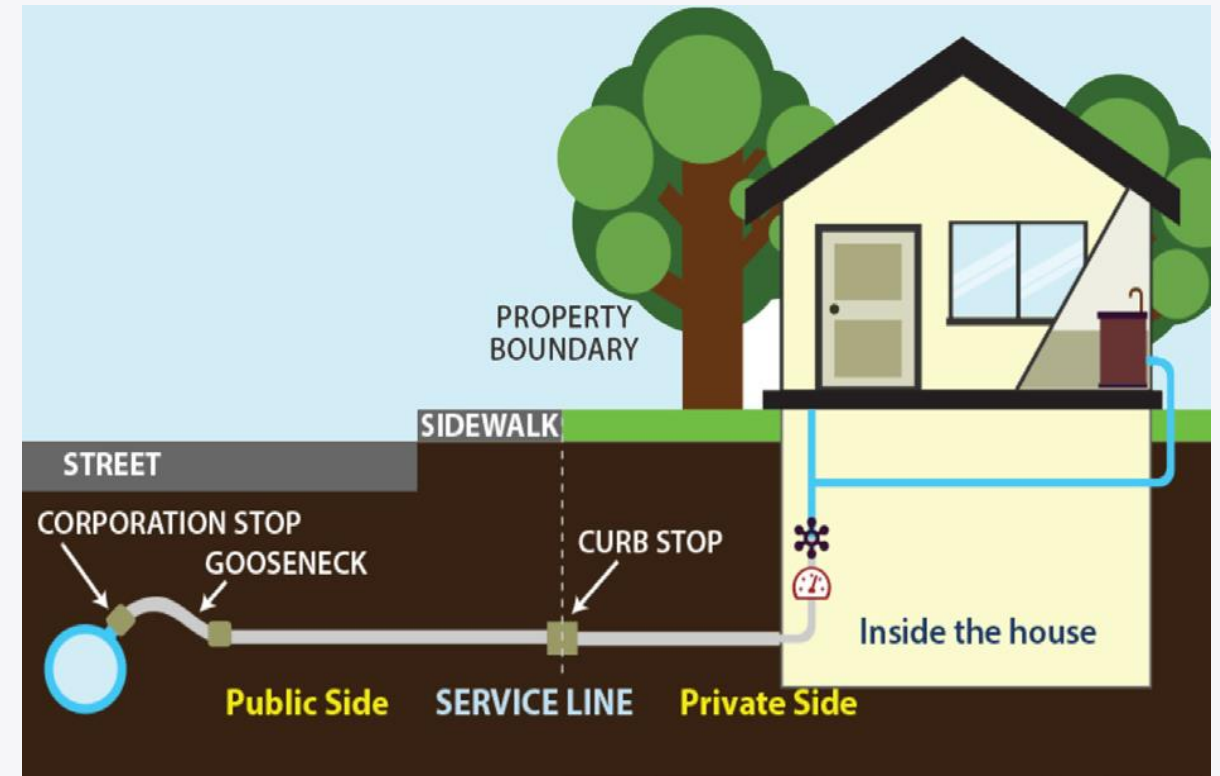
How to identify key stakeholders, initiate contact and build relationships.

Emphasis on Communicating About The Risk of Lead

Focus the message on the source of lead, and not the water itself.

THINK 3 KEY MESSAGES

- Clarify that lead is not in drinking water when it leaves the water treatment plant.
- Explain how lead can enter drinking water.
- Explain what you do to minimize the risk.



What does a parent hear when you say: *Lead in drinking water*

Message Tool


American Water Works Association


Talking about lead: **Say this, not that**

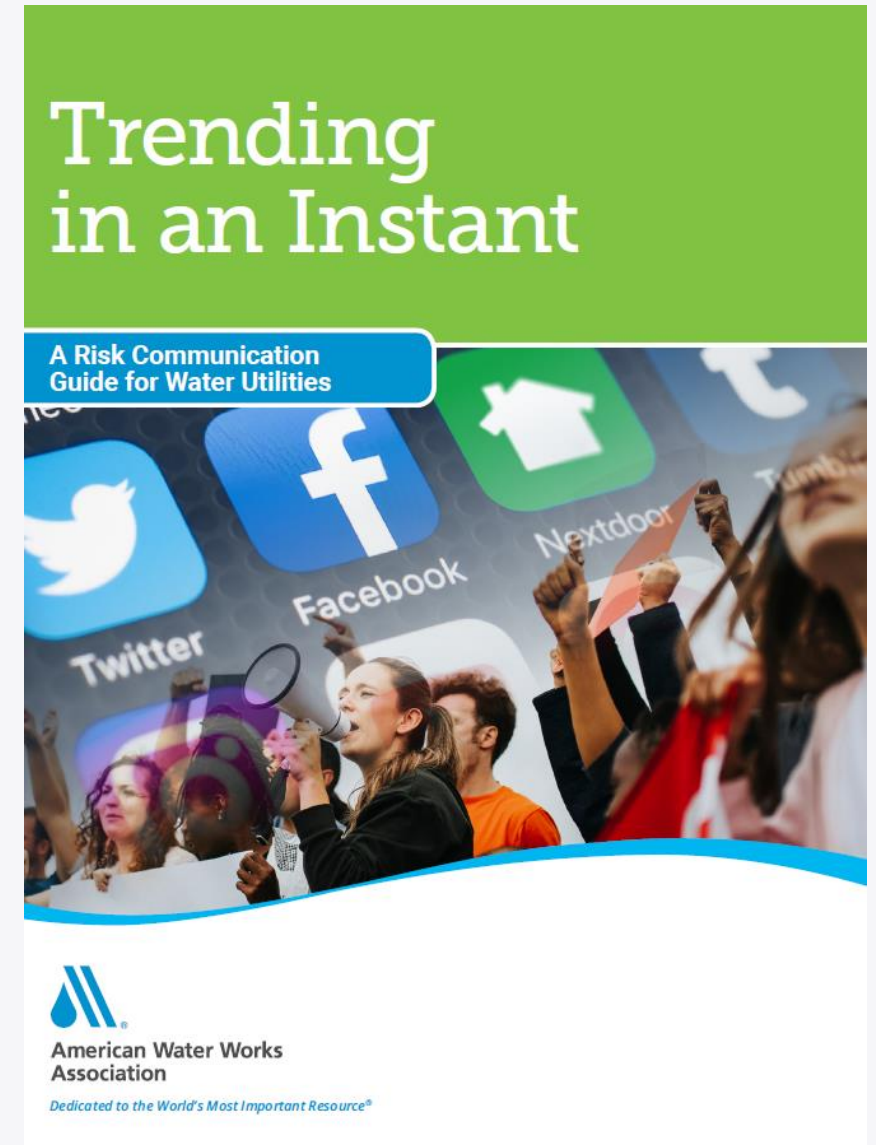
You want to reassure your community that their drinking water is safe. Don't let water industry terminology or jargon get in your way.

How many times have you heard a water utility professional say "lead in water?" When a consumer hears that phrase, they could get the idea that lead is found in the water at the treatment plant rather than coming from home pipes or plumbing.

Here are some examples of how to re-frame your messages about lead so they are effective for your organization and helpful for your community. Keep in mind that your circumstances may be different, so these suggestions should be customized for your utility's needs.

YOUR MESSAGE WAS...	THE CUSTOMER HEARD...	WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO SAY, IS...
I want to talk with you about lead in drinking water.	There is lead in my drinking water.	Let's talk about our efforts to protect you from lead getting into your drinking water.
Our testing shows we are in violation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Action Level for lead.	There is lead in my water, and my household is being harmed.	This violation does not mean that water in all homes contains lead. Lead can only get into drinking water when there are lead pipes and plumbing. We take samples to determine if lead is getting into water in homes known to have lead lines or plumbing. If we find lead at a certain level, we inform the household and broader community and district.

Lead Communications Guide Pairs with “Trending in an Instant,” AWWA’s Risk Communication Guide



Templates to Guide Message Development

- **CAP: Caring, Action Perspective**

Helpful when fear is present. CAP incorporates empathy and helps move from fear to reason.

- **AAF: Acknowledge Uncertainty, Action
Message, Follow-up message**

Use when the immediate goal is to build, maintain or restore trust.

How do you respond?

A local council member contacts the utility after seeing reports of “parts per billion” of lead in a nearby community’s drinking water. The council member demands to know what his drinking water utility is doing to keep the water safe. He asks, “Is there lead in my water?”

How do you respond?

CAP Principle: Caring. Action. Perspective

Our utility is focused on the public's health and I know you are too. The topic of lead can be scary. I want you to know lead is not in our drinking water when it leaves the treatment plants. Our water is safe – we meet all regulations.

The risk for lead to enter the water comes from pipes and plumbing that are made from lead. We adjust the water's chemistry to minimize the risk. But the best way to prevent lead from entering drinking water is to eliminate lead pipes and plumbing.

That's why we're collecting information on the types of pipes in our service that we maintain and that are on the customer's property. Utilities across the United States are doing this too. We're focused on ensuring we produce the best drinking water possible. I'm glad you reached out – you can help share our message.

How do you respond?

A local reporter learns your sampling drinking water fountains in schools for lead. He asks why you're doing this and what have you found?

AAF Framework Example

- **Acknowledge Uncertainty Message:**

We're partnering with our schools to better understand the presence of lead in the school's plumbing systems. Our water system doesn't contain lead, but it can be present in plumbing that serves facilities.

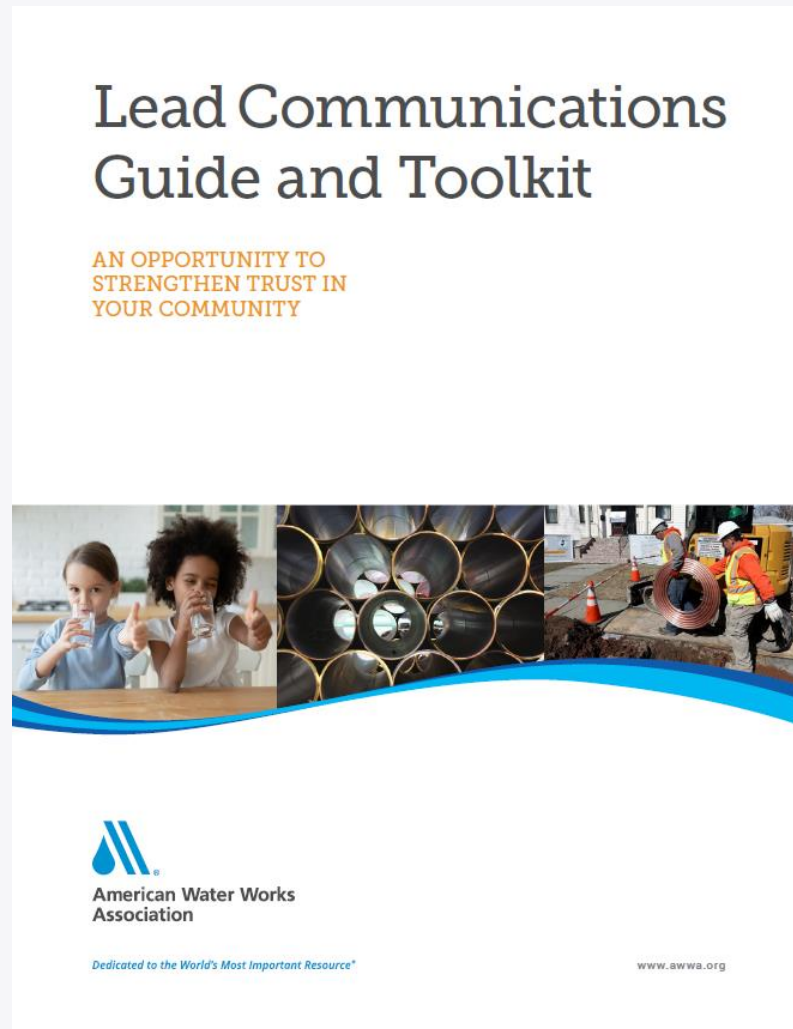
- **Action Message:**

Last week, we partnered with _ School to sample drinking water in fountains, kitchen sinks, and classroom fixtures. We notify parents if the sample determines a location contains lead that exceeds the EPA's Action Level of 15 parts per billion. The library drinking water fountain is one of those locations. The school has removed the fountain from service.

Follow-Up Message:

We'll continue to work with our schools to monitor for lead and provide additional updates. Be assured, the school and our utility are focused on minimizing the risk.

Tools and templates



Guide and Toolkit

[AWWA website](#)



Message guidance

[Messaging tool link](#)



Other Tools

[Videos, articles](#)

Questions?

Christina Montoya-Halter

El Paso Water

AWWA Public Affairs Council

cmontoya@epwater.org



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