

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 adjust water chemistry to address the problem.

“There is no safe level of lead.”

Tap water is unsafe.

We understand you may be concerned about lead getting into your drinking water. To minimize that risk, we (INSERT STEPS YOU ARE TAKING.) Lead gets into the water from pipes and fixtures made of lead, but not all pipes or homes have lead. To view the records we have for the pipes on your property and learn what to do if your plumbing has lead, go to (INSERT WEBSITE.)

YOUR MESSAGE WAS...

THE CUSTOMER HEARD...

WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO SAY, IS...

A federal regulation requires us to sample the drinking water in this school/day care center.

What does this mean? Is there lead in the water? Why are you just now sampling?

Protecting public health is our focus and that includes monitoring water quality at the treatment plants and in the pipes that carry the water to homes and businesses. We already test for the presence of lead in homes that have known lead pipes and plumbing. Now, a new EPA regulation asks that we collaborate with schools and daycares, working in partnership to improve water quality. We'll share the monitoring results and if needed, work with the school or daycare to correct a problem.

You need to flush your water lines.

You need me to flush the toilet?

Flushing the water lines means moving water through your home plumbing. Keeping water moving helps ensure the water you drink is the freshest available. When you don't use water in your home for a period of time, there's a greater chance for the water quality to decline.

We practice corrosion control.

You're doing some kind of water control?

At our treatment plant, our scientists adjust the water chemistry so it's less likely to dissolve any lead that might be in water pipes and fixtures. This treatment is called corrosion control.

