



## ***BOROUGH OF ESSEX FELLS***

**255 ROSELAND AVENUE**

**ESSEX FELLS, NJ 07021**

**(973) 226-3400**

### **Lead and Galvanized Service Line Identification and Replacement Program**

#### **FAQ for Residents**

(updated as of November 3, 2022)

#### **Is there lead in local water?**

Lead testing results for water samples collected in Essex Fells consistently meet state and federal drinking water standards. In compliance with the federal government's "Lead and Copper" rule, the Borough has tested for lead in water at selected residents' homes for over 15 years. No elevated lead levels have been detected.

#### **Why is Essex Fells implementing a service line inspection and replacement program?**

The Borough is implementing a service line inspection and replacement program because a new law in New Jersey requires all municipalities to do so. In July 2021, the state enacted P.L. 2021, Ch. 183, which requires every community water system in New Jersey to inventory all home service lines in within their respective service areas and cause any that contain lead to be replaced by 2031. The law also requires the replacement of any galvanized metal pipes (steel pipe coated in zinc).

This new law reflects the fact that the most common source of lead in tap water, where it exists, is customers' home plumbing and service lines, not the water supply. Homeowners' service lines may be made of copper, plastic, galvanized steel or lead.

Given the variety of materials that may have been used at each property over time, the new law requires us to verify the composition of the service line at every address. To the extent that any lead or galvanized components are found in your service line, the entire service line must be replaced by 2031. This includes the privately-owned portion of the service line located on your property, as well as the portion of the service line under the street that is owned by the Borough.

#### **What is a service line? Who owns it – the homeowner or the Borough?**

A service line is the water pipe that connects the interior of your home or building to the public water main in the street. The service line is typically less than 2 inches in diameter and it can be made of various materials. The most common pipe material in use today is copper; other materials that have been used for pipes and connections include plastic, cast iron, galvanized steel and lead.

In Essex Fells, each property owner owns the service line from their water meter out to their "curb stop," which is the exterior water service shutoff valve for the property. A curb stop is usually located near the edge of the street. The Borough owns the remaining portion of the service line, between the curb stop and the water main.

Property owners are generally responsible for the installation, maintenance and any replacement of the private portion of their service line, just as they are responsible for the plumbing within their home. This new law provides an exception to that general rule. Accordingly, if your service line is confirmed to contain any lead or galvanized components, by 2031 the Borough is required either to replace the entire line or to confirm that the property owner has done so.

## What has been done to date? What happens next?

Our Water Department has completed an initial survey of properties, based on Borough records regarding when each property was initially developed and our knowledge of what types of pipe materials were most common in that era. The service line inventory is available at <https://www.essexfellsboro.com/pages/lead>. Please note that this inventory is preliminary, and is merely intended to identify properties where, based only on the age of the building, additional information is needed at this time.

Based on the records available to us, the public portions of service lines in the Borough do not contain lead piping or lead connections. There are some galvanized connections – which will need to be phased out under the new law.

The composition of the privately-owned side of each service line is less certain, because those lines were privately installed and a wider variety of materials were used. We expect that some private pipes or connections may be galvanized, however, based solely on our knowledge of when galvanized materials were commonly used in homes and how long they can last if they are well-built, well-installed and well-maintained.

Our next step is to conduct field examinations to verify the composition of the privately-owned side of service lines at all properties in town developed before 1960. We expect most of these homes have service lines made of copper or other modern materials, but the only way to be certain is to inspect each line. The Borough has contracted with VEPO Metering to perform the inspections, which are expected to begin in November. Anyone whose property will be inspected will receive a letter explaining the process and how to schedule the inspection. These appointments generally take less than 15 minutes and do not require any interruption in your water service.

Our service line inventory will be updated periodically until the composition of local service lines has been confirmed in accordance with NJ law and any lead or galvanized service lines have been replaced.

## What are galvanized lines? Why is New Jersey requiring their replacement?

Galvanized service lines are steel pipes that were dipped in a protective zinc coating. Galvanized piping was commonly installed in homes built before 1960 and was used for water supply lines. Decades of exposure to water can cause galvanized pipes to corrode and rust on the inside. This corrosion can cause water discoloration, leaks and/or low water pressure, as well as certain health concerns. There are two basic health concerns that link corroded galvanized pipes with potential lead exposure:

- The production process used by some pipe manufacturers added trace amounts of lead and other impurities to the zinc coating that could potentially leach into the water if the pipe corrodes.
- If galvanized steel pipes were ever connected to lead plumbing, any corrosion inside the galvanized pipes could have trapped small pieces of lead. Even if the lead piping was removed years ago, the galvanized pipes could still release the trapped lead into the water flow.

As a result, New Jersey's new law requires galvanized service lines and connections to be identified and replaced, in addition to replacing any pipes or connections that are actually made of lead.

## The Borough's service line inventory indicates (or I received a letter saying) that I may have a galvanized service line, or that the composition of my service line is unknown. What does that mean?

At the moment, all it means is that Borough records indicate that your home was built before 1960, a time when galvanized pipes were more commonly used. The Borough therefore would like to inspect and confirm the composition of your service line.

While we expect that many people with homes built before 1960 actually do not have galvanized service lines, we are required by law to confirm the facts. If we find any galvanized or (less likely) lead lines or components, those will have to be replaced by 2031.

## I did not receive a letter but someone I know (e.g., my neighbor) received one. Why is this?

If you have not received a letter by the end of 2022, it likely means that Borough records show that your home was built in 1960 or later. The initial phase of our service line inspection program is focused on older homes.

The Borough's current service line inventory (available at <https://www.essexfellsboro.com/pages/lead>) assumes that houses constructed in 1960 or later have copper service lines; the town will validate this assumption at a later date. The Borough's service line inventory will be updated periodically as additional information is obtained regarding all homes, including those constructed in 1960 or later.

## I don't want to wait for the Borough inspection. How do I identify the composition of my service line on my own?

If you want to identify the composition of your service line on your own, the best way to do it is to examine the service line where it enters your home through a basement wall or floor. The Lead Service Line Collaborative has some suggestions, which may be found here:

<https://www.lslr-collaborative.org/identifying-service-line-material.html>.

You can also contact a licensed plumber and ask them to perform a plumbing inspection of your service line (and any other plumbing or fixtures in your home). If you do this, please obtain a written report from your plumber regarding the composition of the service line and keep a copy for your records.

Do not excavate the service line under your yard or near the street without first obtaining utility mark outs (dial 811 to access NJ's "call before you dig" system). Please also contact the Essex Fells Water Department to advise them of any excavation plans.

Regardless of your own efforts, please understand that New Jersey law requires the Borough to verify the composition of your service line.

## If my service line has to be replaced, when will that be done?

Galvanized and, if applicable, lead service lines will be replaced over the next ten years. A schedule for individual lines will be determined once we complete the field inspections.

You will be notified of the results of any inspection of your service line. You will also be notified before the Borough performs any replacement work on your property, and you will have the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns.

## Can I elect to replace the service line on my own?

Yes. You can replace the private portion of your service line (to the curb stop) at any time. It's your property. We ask, however, that you please contact the Borough prior to replacement so that we can coordinate our efforts, shut off the water service during the work and maintain an up-to-date service line inventory.

While grant opportunities may be available for municipalities that replace galvanized or lead service lines, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection is not currently offering funding directly to homeowners for lead service line replacement. Any cost associated with replacing your own service line will be borne entirely by you.

## Who will bear the costs of this program, including the cost of replacing any service line?

The costs incurred by the Borough in replacing any private side/customer-owned service lines, excluding any portion that we are able to fund through grants or other subsidies, may be (1) assessed to the applicable property owner or (2) borne by all water customers in Essex Fells through an increase in the local water rate. The Borough Council will make a determination regarding how to allocate such costs most fairly following the completion of field examinations.

The cost of undertaking the evaluation and inspection of service lines, and the cost of replacing any galvanized components on the *public* side of the service line, will be factored into the Water Department budget and recovered through the water rate paid by Essex Fells residents.

To minimize the financial impact of the service line identification and replacement program, we are investigating potential financing and reimbursement options, such as funds available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal and loan packages and principal forgiveness available for small water systems.

### How would lead get into drinking water?

Lead is not normally found in drinking water at the source. As indicated above, the Borough tests for lead under the federal Lead and Copper rule and the results do not show an issue with lead, either in the sampled homes or in the source water.

When lead is present in the tap water of a given home in the United States, it typically gets into the water when service lines, household plumbing faucets and fixtures, and other plumbing materials containing lead corrode and leach into the water over time. In homes with lead service lines, the service line is typically the most significant source of lead in the water. Among homes without lead service lines, the most common problems are with brass faucets and the use of lead solder in plumbing connections.

### What are the health effects of lead?

Exposure to lead from sources including drinking water can cause serious health problems. Lead can pass from a pregnant woman to her developing fetus from previous high lead exposure or from exposure during the pregnancy. Lead exposure during pregnancy can put the mother at risk for miscarriage, cause the baby to be born too early or too small, hurt the baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system, and increase the likelihood of learning or behavioral problems. Infants and children exposed to lead can develop behavior and learning problems, have lower IQ and hyperactivity, slowed growth and development, hearing problems and anemia. Adults exposed to lead can experience cardiovascular effects, increased blood pressure, incidence of hypertension, decreased kidney function, and reproductive problems.

### What can I do to minimize potential exposure to lead in drinking water?

If you wish to minimize potential exposure to lead in drinking water, you may consider the following options:

- Flush taps in your home for at least 30 seconds after water has been stagnant for more than six hours. If your home has a long service line, longer flushing times may be necessary.
- Consider purchasing a filter certified by NSF International to remove lead; a list is available here: <https://info.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU/>.
- Only use cold water for cooking and preparing baby formula.
- If you have a concern regarding your home plumbing or service line and would like to have your water tested for lead, a test kit can be ordered through the Essex Fells Water Department. The Water Department has testing kits on hand, though availability at any one time is subject to demand. Please contact the Borough at (973) 226-3400 if you would like to order a test kit.

For additional information regarding reducing your exposure to lead in drinking water, you may visit the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's webpage at, [www.nj.gov/dep/lead](http://www.nj.gov/dep/lead).

### Is this new program related to recent actions taken by the Borough to remove PFOA from Essex Fells water?

No. There is no connection between the two – except that in both cases the Borough has taken action to ensure the continued quality of your drinking water, in compliance with new laws and regulations issued by the State of New Jersey.

A key difference between the two regulatory initiatives is that PFOA treatment relates to water systems removing a newly-regulated substance from *source water*. In contrast, the risk of exposure to lead in drinking water does not come from the water source, but from home plumbing and home service lines (for more information on this, see the section above entitled "How would lead get into drinking water?"). The service line identification and replacement law is aimed at confirming that all home service lines in New Jersey are made of modern plumbing materials. This requires municipal water systems in the state to go home-by-home and complete a comprehensive inventory of the service lines in their respective service areas.