Indiana Department of Environmental Management

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How Lead Gets in the Water

Some public water systems are facing a complex problem, due to aging pipes. Lead can be found in the pipes and/or plumbing that carries water to its consumers.

Water Source

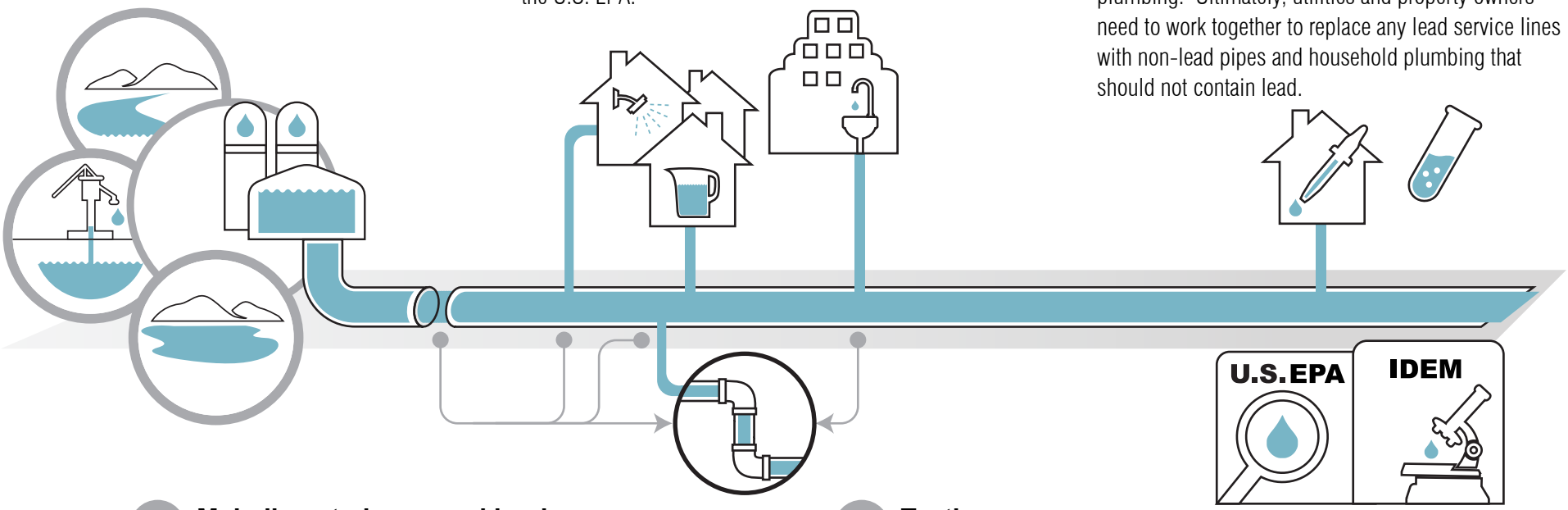
Lakes, rivers, reservoirs, and wells do not usually contain action-level lead amounts, but the water can be corrosive to lead pipes.

Treatment facility

All large systems (serving a population greater than 50,000 people) must have treatment in place to control corrosivity of the water. Small and medium-sized systems must have treatment in place if the systems exceed the lead or copper action level, as determined by the U.S. EPA.

Reducing the contamination

Utilities should test and treat water to control the corrosivity at the treatment facility. The most common treatment involves adding chemical phosphates to coat the inner lining of the service pipes to reduce contact between the water and the lead in the pipes and/or plumbing. Ultimately, utilities and property owners need to work together to replace any lead service lines with non-lead pipes and household plumbing that should not contain lead.



Main lines to home and businesses

The main water line pipes coming directly from the treatment plant do not contain lead. Some water mains have packing that connects pipes together, which may contain lead. Service line pipes (the lines running from the water main to the home) may be made of lead.

Testing

IDEM and the U.S. EPA have the same drinking water rule standards. The rule specifies kitchen or bathroom cold water taps at single family residences should be tested every three years. If more than 10% of the locations sampled have lead levels above the action level, additional action is required by the water system.