

lead explained

lead in drinking water

In Scotland, lead does not occur in significant concentrations in mains water, and is only a problem for our customers when the water comes into contact with lead service pipes, lead joints or lead tanks.

This factsheet will provide you with information on:

- where lead comes from
- where we sample
- lead service pipes
- lead soldered joints
- lead tanks
- why lead can be a problem
- how to check if you have lead pipes
- what to do if you have lead pipes
- how to contact us

where lead comes from

The use of lead service pipes was phased out during the 1960's and officially became illegal in 1969. Modern service pipes are made of blue plastic.

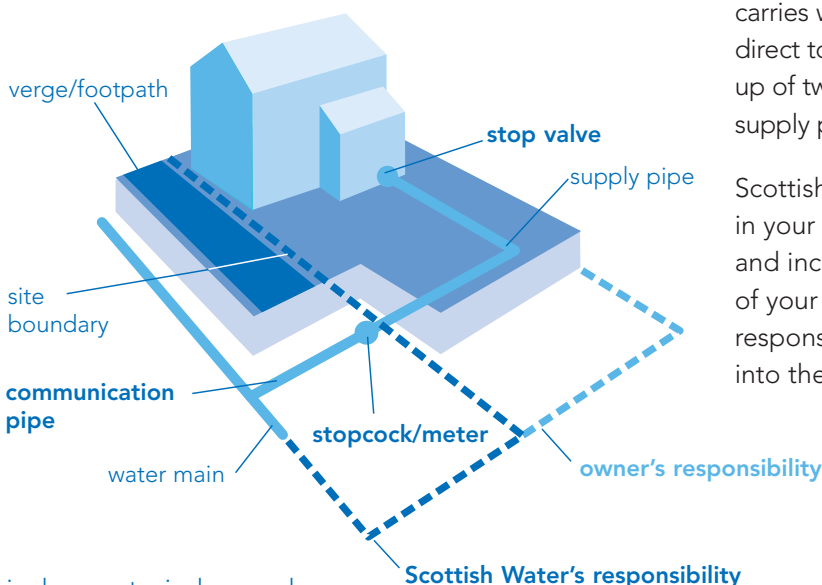
where we sample

Water is sampled regularly at our treatment works, service reservoirs and at our customers' taps to monitor the quality of the drinking water. In addition to this, some water quality parameters are continuously monitored at major treatment works. Across Scotland laboratory tests are carried out on water samples each year for regulatory purposes. Many more samples are taken by staff for operational reasons (e.g. bursts, new mains, complaints). The percentage of all regulatory samples complying with the relevant standards in Scotland is over 99%.

lead service pipes (supply + communication pipes)

If there is a higher than background level of lead in your drinking water this is likely to be caused by the service pipe to your property. This is the pipe that carries water from the water main in your street direct to your property. The service pipe is made up of two parts – the communication pipe and the supply pipe (please see the diagram opposite).

Scottish Water is responsible for the water main in your street and the communication pipe up to, and including, the stopcock at the boundary of your property. The property owner is then responsible for the supply pipe from the stopcock into the property and all of the indoor plumbing.



This shows a typical example.



lead soldered joints

Lead may also enter your water supply through soldered joints in household copper pipework. Although lead solder for these types of joints was prohibited in 1987, there is evidence that lead solder is still sometimes used illegally. Scottish Water recommends that you always use a plumber registered with SNIPEF (Scottish & Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers Federation). Full contact details are provided at the end of this factsheet.

lead tanks

Some older properties, including tenements, may still have a lead-lined water storage tank.

Where the drinking water tap in the kitchen is supplied from a household storage tank Scottish Water advises that the kitchen plumbing is changed to connect this tap direct from the supply pipe. This is particularly important if there is a lead-lined tank, because lead may enter the water from this tank.

For further guidance please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855**, or seek advice from your registered plumber.

why lead can be a problem

When water lies in contact with lead service pipes, lead-lined tanks, or lead solder, particularly for longer periods (e.g. overnight) it can absorb lead. The longer time that water lies in contact with lead, the more lead will enter the water.

A risk that is associated with lead is the potential effect that it could have on the intellectual development of children. Young and unborn children are therefore considered to be at special risk. For this reason it is important that we keep lead levels in drinking water down to the lowest level, particularly for those at special risk.

lead in drinking water and the law

We must meet a strict standard on the level of lead in drinking water. The maximum limit (PCV – Prescribed Concentration or Value) for lead in drinking water from your tap is **25 microgrammes per litre**. This will be further reduced to 10 microgrammes per litre from the end of 2013.

how to check if you have lead pipes

If you live in an older property you may still have some lead plumbing present. You may already know if you have a lead service pipe or a lead-lined storage tank within your property.

Even if you have already replaced your internal plumbing, it is important to check if any underground water pipes in your garden or driveway are made of lead.

If you are not sure whether you have any lead pipework please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855** (we may organise a water sample from your property) or alternatively, phone your local council's Environmental Services Department and ask for advice. You will find contact details for your local council in your phone book.

what to do if you have lead pipes

If the analysis of your water sample shows that the lead level is higher than the current PCV (25 microgrammes per litre), we would advise you to consider replacing your lead pipes as soon as possible. We will replace our communication pipe, if it is found to be lead, when the PCV is exceeded.

grants

You may be able to obtain a grant for part of this lead replacement work from your local council. For specific information on your local council and up to date details of funds available, please contact your local council's Environmental Health Department. You will find full contact details in your phone book.

If you find that you have lead solder fittings and your house is less than 10 years old you should contact the house builder. Alternatively, contact a SNIPEF registered plumber for further advice and information.

practical steps to reduce lead in drinking water

If you think you have lead pipe, you should follow these simple steps until you are able to replace them:

- Always take your drinking and cooking water directly from a mains-fed tap. This is normally the tap at the kitchen sink.
- Never use water for drinking or cooking from any hot tap. Warm water increases the amount of lead that is absorbed from plumbing.
- Run the mains tap first thing in the morning to flush out any water that has been lying overnight before using any water for drinking or cooking. You should also do this if the water has not been used all day (e.g. when you're out at work) and always before making up bottle feeds for infants.
- Two minutes is usually enough to flush out this water. However, if your service pipe is longer than average, you'll need to allow a bit longer for the water to flush through.

If you need any more information, please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855**.

how to contact us

Details of water quality testing in your area can be obtained by contacting us and asking to speak to one of our specialists in the Public Health team.

If you require more information on our services, please contact us:

By phone on our Customer Helpline **0845 601 8855**

On the web at **www.scottishwater.co.uk**

Or in writing at **Scottish Water, PO Box 8855, Edinburgh, EH10 6YQ**

Scottish & Northern Plumbing Employers Federation (SNIPEF) can be contacted:

By phone: **0131 225 2255**

Office hours Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

On the web: **www.needaplumber.org**

Alternative formats of this leaflet can be made available free of charge. For information on Braille, large print, audio and a variety of languages, please call our Customer Helpline.

Please quote this reference code when contacting us: **SWFact LE4 04/11**

We record all calls for quality and training purposes.