



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Lower lead content requirements for drinking water plumbing materials start in January

RALEIGH – Starting Jan. 4, new drinking water plumbing fixtures installed or repaired in drinking water systems or newly installed in homes must meet federal requirements for lower lead content.

Plumbing contractors and consumers should check for proper certification marks on the product or manufacturer's documentation to be sure the materials meet the new requirements of the federal Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act, officials with the N.C. Division of Water Resources say. The new law, enacted in 2011, is an amendment to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

Lead exposure, especially for children, can have significant adverse health effects. Most lead exposure occurs through eating or inhaling lead paint chips and dust. Introduction of lead through drinking water plumbing and fixtures may account for up to 20 percent of total lead ingestion.

Public water systems routinely sample for lead and testing is performed on newly installed private wells. Information for sampling existing private wells is available at local health departments. However, lead can also get into drinking water at the household level through service lines and interior plumbing and fixtures.

As part of the new federal legislation, the definition of "lead-free" has changed from a maximum content of 8 percent lead to a maximum weighted average of 0.25 percent lead for the wetted surfaces of pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fittings and fixtures that provide water for human consumption. The definition of "lead-free" for solders and flux is unchanged, and continues to be defined as containing not more than 0.2 percent lead.

Plumbing items used or supplied for use in public and private drinking water systems – new installations and repairs of existing systems – must meet the new regulations. Household fixtures and pipes, if newly installed, should also meet the requirements. Some plumbing materials have third-party certification marks that identify them as products that meet the new standards. The Environmental Protection Agency has information available on its website about identifying lead-free certified materials at <http://1.usa.gov/1aOjKZf>.

Plumbing materials that don't meet the new standards may still be used for non-potable installations such as irrigation, toilets, urinals, bidets and shower valves.

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