**BEYOND FLINT**

**HIGH LEAD LEVELS FOUND IN 2,000 WATER SYSTEMS ACROSS USA**

*Lead in your water a USA Today Network Investigation*

While a deadly national spotlight focuses on the drinking water crisis in Flint, Mich., a USA TODAY NETWORK investigation found high lead levels in drinking water systems across the country. 

**INSIDE**

- **How lead gets into your drinking water**
- **How to check your supply**

Many of the highest reported lead levels were found in systems with connected services. One such system is in a Milwaukee neighborhood, where a water sample showed lead levels 24 times higher than the EPA limit of 15 parts per billion. A Florida school had the highest recorded level, at an 84 times EPA limit. As of March 3, 2016, the highest reported lead level was at 6 million parts per billion. 

*Melissa Haffman, 40, expresses her concerns about high lead levels found in her children's school, Carville Elementary, during a town hall meeting in Hanoa, N.Y., on March 3.*

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**President Obama and Vice President Biden later on Judge Merrick Garland speak at the White House on Monday after he was nominated to the Supreme Court.**

**High court pick is centrist, but Senate still defiant**

Obama chooses Merrick Garland to fill seat

The Obama administration defended the nomination of Merrick Garland to replace Justice Antonin Scalia on the high court. The Garland selection could impact decisions in the high court on abortion, the death penalty and gun rights.

At 63, he would be the oldest justice since retired Justice John Paul Stevens, who served on the court from 1975 until 2010. In his new role, Garland will need to defuse escalating partisan conflicts and persuade other justices to finally act on gun rights issues.

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**Garland prosecuted Okla. City bombing**

**Kevin Johnson**

**US. calls on N. Korea to free student**

American tourist sentenced to 15 years

The Obama administration declined to comment Monday on North Korea's annual March 16th celebration, but its new ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, said in an interview with CNN on Monday that the country's human rights abuses were unacceptable.

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**In news**

**IN LIFE**

*Passion* for live TV musicals grows

Chris Daughtry to play Jesus disciple Judas in modern take on tale

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**In sports**

**THURSDAY**

**16 SEEDS THAT COULD BREAK YOUR BRACKET**

**16 Seeds That Could Break Your Bracket**

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**USA Today Network Analysis of EPA regulations found at least 180 school systems in which lead levels exceeded EPA standards. Of those systems, 114 are in schools in Flint. This is the Flint River Water System, which has more than double the EPA limit of lead.**

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Read the pdf or click here to read online

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*Published March 17, 2016*
Excessive lead levels found in almost 2,000 water systems across all 50 states

While a harsh national spotlight focuses on the drinking water crisis in Flint, Mich., a USA TODAY NETWORK investigation has identified almost 2,000 additional water systems spanning all 50 states where testing has shown excessive levels of lead contamination over the past four years.

The water systems, which reported lead levels exceeding Environmental Protection Agency standards, collectively supply water to 6 million people. About 350 of those systems provide drinking water to schools or day cares. The USA TODAY NETWORK investigation also found at least 180 of the water systems failed to notify consumers about the high lead levels as federal rules require.

Many of the highest reported lead levels were found at schools and day cares. A water sample at a Maine elementary school was 42 times higher than the EPA limit of 15 parts per billion, while a Pennsylvania preschool
was 14 times higher, records show. At an elementary school in Ithaca, NY., one sample tested this year at a stunning 5,000 ppb of lead, the EPA’s threshold for “hazardous waste.”

“This is most definitely a problem that needs emergent care,” Melissa Hoffman, a parent in Ithaca, forcefully pleaded with officials at a public hearing packed with upset parents demanding answers.

In all, the USA TODAY NETWORK analysis of EPA enforcement data identified 600 water systems in which tests at some taps showed lead levels topping 40 parts per billion (ppb), which is more than double the EPA’s action level limit. While experts caution Flint is an extreme case of pervasive contamination, those lead levels rival the 400-plus of the worst samples in far more extensive testing of around 15,000 taps across Flint. The 40 ppb mark also stands as a threshold that the EPA once labeled on its website an “imminent” health threat for pregnant women and young children.

Even at small doses, lead poses a health threat, especially for pregnant women and young children. Lead can damage growing brains and cause reduced IQs, attention disorders and other problem behaviors. Infants fed formula made with contaminated tap water face significant risk. Adults are not immune, with evidence linking lead exposure to kidney problems, high blood pressure and increased risks of cardiovascular deaths. The EPA stresses there is no safe level of lead exposure.

**Fractured system, limited testing**

Most Americans get their drinking water from a fragmented network of about 155,000 different water systems serving everything from big cities to individual businesses and school buildings. The EPA determines that a system has exceeded the lead standard when more than 10% of samples taken show lead levels above 15 parts per billion. It’s called an “action level” because, at that level, water systems are required to take action
reduce contamination. But enforcement, which is implemented state by state, can be inconsistent and spotty. Some 373 systems have failed repeatedly, with tests continuing to find excessive lead in tests months or even years later, the EPA data shows. What’s more, the systems have widely varying levels of financial resources and staff training.

Amid cotton fields in Lamesa, Texas, for example, tests last year showed lead contamination more than seven times the EPA limit at Klondike Independent School District, which serves 260 students in a single K-12 building. “Some things just slip by,” said the school superintendent Steve McLaren when pressed about skipping a round of testing in 2014. In a tiny school system, McLaren said leaders “wear a lot of hats.” At times he’s served as principal and bus driver, in addition to being superintendent and in charge of the drinking water system. The school replaced drinking fountains, and plans to replace its entire water system next fall. McLaren said he’s concerned about how high lead levels might affect students and understands the need for action. But he said, “Our kids are strapping and healthy, and they’ve been drinking this water all their lives.”

The testing required by the government can include samples from as few as five or 10 taps in a year, or even over multiple years. The system is designed only to give an indication of whether homes or buildings with lead pipes and plumbing may be at higher risk of lead leaching into water. Even the biggest water systems in cities are required to test just 50 to 100 taps.

The limited and inconsistent testing means the full scope of the lead contamination problem could be even more widespread. People in thousands more communities served by water systems that have been deemed in compliance with the EPA’s lead rules have no assurance their drinking water is safe from the brain-damaging toxin.

“Flint is an extreme case and helps show how limited testing required by the EPA provides only a crude indicator of systems where harmful levels of lead may be in water at homes with lead pipes. The struggling city of about 100,000 people passed the government’s required lead tests. But one resident’s vocal complaints spurred extra tests at her home, revealing shocking levels of lead contamination: 104 to 13,200 ppb. The crisis worsened as independent researchers tested 300 samples across the city, revealing homes with high lead levels that the government-mandated tests missed. More than 10% contained at least 27 ppb of lead. Since then, regulators conducted another 15,000 tests. More than 1,000 samples show lead above the 15 ppb limit, and more than 400 show dangerous levels above 40 ppb.

Drinking water typically isn’t contaminated with lead when it leaves the treatment plant. It becomes contaminated as it travels through lead service lines on individual properties and lead plumbing fixtures inside homes. At best, the EPA’s rules and testing are a sentinel system, alerting officials of the need to treat their water with anti-corrosion chemicals. Doing so reduces, but does not eliminate, the lead in water reaching the tap.

There are about 75 million homes across the country built before 1980, meaning they’re most likely to contain some lead plumbing. That’s more than half of the country’s housing units, according to the Census Bureau. The heaviest concentrations are in New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

“Flint’s risk factors not rare

Experts say what happened in Flint is an extreme case and helps show how the limited testing required by the EPA provides only a crude indicator of systems where harmful levels of lead may be in water at homes with lead pipes. The struggling city of about 100,000 people passed the government’s required lead tests. But one resident’s vocal complaints spurred extra tests at her home, revealing shocking levels of lead contamination: 104 to 13,200 ppb. The crisis worsened as independent researchers tested 300 samples across the city, revealing homes with high lead levels that the government-mandated tests missed. More than 10% contained at least 27 ppb of lead. Since then, regulators conducted another 15,000 tests. More than 1,000 samples show lead above the 15 ppb limit, and more than 400 show dangerous levels above 40 ppb.

One unique factor in Flint: the water
department changed to a corrosive river water source, then failed to treat it with anti-corrosion chemicals. The result: a pervasive contamination problem as the insides of old lead pipes broke down and released a torrent of poison.

Yet the fundamental risk factor in Flint – old lead service lines that deliver water to homes, plus interior plumbing containing lead – is a common problem for tens of millions of homes mostly built before 1986. Unlike other contaminants that can be filtered out at the water plant, lead usually gets into drinking water at the end of the system, as it comes onto individual properties and into homes.

At greatest risk, experts say, are an estimated 7.3 million homes connected to their utility’s water mains by individual lead service lines -- the pipe carrying water from the main under the street onto your property and into your home. The water passes through what amounts to “a pure lead straw,” said Marc Edwards, a Virginia Tech environmental engineering professor who has studied water contamination in Flint and a similar, earlier crisis in Washington, D.C.

Lead service lines were mostly installed before the 1930s, although some communities continued to lay lead pipes for decades longer. The way tap water becomes contaminated – at or even inside individual homes – poses a vexing problem for regulators, utilities and consumers. A home with a lead service line and older internal plumbing may have high levels of lead in its tap water. But a nearby, newly constructed home may have no lead contamination. The only way to know if your house is at risk is to find out about its water line and plumbing.

“People are legitimately concerned about what they’re hearing in the wake of Flint,” said Lynn Thorp, of the advocacy group Clean Water Action, who recently served on a federal work-group on lead in drinking water. “As long as we have lead in contact with drinking water, we can have exposure at the tap.” Thorp said consumers need to become educated about any risks at their individual homes.

What is government doing?

Under the EPA’s Lead and Copper Rule, implemented in 1991, the government’s approach for protecting people from lead in drinking water has relied heavily on water systems monitoring for indications that their water has become more corrosive. The more corrosive the water, the more lead will be drawn out of pipes. Treatment of water with anti-corrosion chemicals can only reduce, not eliminate, lead from leaking into tap water in invisible and tasteless doses.

That’s why the EPA’s National Drinking Water Advisory Council wrote agency leaders in December calling for removing lead service lines “to the greatest degree possible.” It’s a daunting recommendation since in most cases, the water utility owns part of the line and the rest belongs to the homeowner. A credit ratings firm warned this month that replacing lead service lines could cost tens of billions of dollars.

“We’re now dealing with a legacy issue on
private property distributed throughout many communities,” said Tracy Mehan, the American Water Works Association’s executive director of government affairs. The cost to replace each service line can range from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Meanwhile, the EPA advisory council, whose members include experts from water utilities and state agencies, recommended that EPA take numerous steps to strengthen the existing regulation. They include developing a “household action level” that would trigger public health actions when lead contamination reaches certain levels and ensuring the public receives more information about the risks they face.

In addition, state water regulators say, federal officials need to tell water utilities what level of lead contamination indicates an acute health risk that should trigger a “do not drink” alert to all of the systems’ customers. The EPA is evaluating the recommendations and expects to propose revisions to its lead contamination regulations in 2017.

“We really recognize there’s a need to strengthen the rule,” Joel Beauvais, deputy assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Water, said in an interview.

While he characterized Flint as an outlier, he said, “There’s no question we have challenges with lead in drinking water across the country. Millions of lead service lines in thousands of systems.”

Changing the rules could take at least a year. Beauvais said the EPA is working now to make sure states fully enforce existing rules. The agency last month sent letters to governors and state regulators calling for greater attention to drinking water oversight. While federal rules are made by the EPA, they’re enforced by the states.

Because of Flint, some utilities and state water regulators said they were already taking a closer look at water systems where testing identified excessive lead.

“It has caused a sort of shock wave through the drinking water industry generally,” said Jim Taft, executive director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators. States are looking at water systems’ performance and oversight, he said, “to make sure we’re not missing something.”

**High lead in systems large, small**

At a trailer home at the Maple Ridge Mobile Home Park in Corinna, Maine, Christi Woodruff recalls the notice hung on her door last year alerting her to potential lead contamination in the neighborhood.

A mom with an 8-year-old daughter, Woodruff initially planned to get her water tested. But, she shrugged it off after the park’s landlord told her testing was unnecessary. “The manager said not to worry because it was only certain trailers ... He didn’t think my trailer was one of them,” she said.

Property manager Randy Dixon blamed tap water from a single old trailer with lead-soldered copper pipes for causing the park’s water to fail the EPA’s testing. He then told a USA TODAY NETWORK reporter to stop interviewing residents.

The analysis of EPA’s data show the Maine park is among almost 2,000 water systems flagged for having an “action level exceedance” for lead during 2012 through 2015. That generally means more than 10% of tap water samples taken during a testing period showed lead contamination above 15 ppb.

If you’re living in a home with a lead service line and received a notice about possible lead contamination, “it’s a good idea to get your water tested,” said Beauvais, the EPA water office official.

Most of the water systems that failed the EPA’s lead standard serve anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand people each, often running their lines to homes.
in rural communities, or managing water for individual schools or businesses in remote areas.

In Lake Mills, Wisc., about 50 miles west of Milwaukee, EPA records show the utility serving water to 5,300 people failed lead tests in 2013, 2014 and again in 2015 with some readings several times the federal limit.

Paul Hermanson, director of Public Works, said Lake Mills sent fliers with water bills since 2010 urging residents in older homes to run their water 15 to 30 seconds before using it. The idea behind not using the first water out of the tap is to avoid drinking water that’s been touching the old pipes and has the greatest risk of containing lead.

“I don’t know that there’s a good solution to it other than running the water,” he said.

Some of the older homes in the growing bedroom community of Firestone, Colo., about 30 miles north of Denver, tested for excessive lead four times since 2014, records show. Town officials said they have repeatedly notified their 9,500 water customers of potentially harmful lead levels and distributed information explaining how to reduce risk. “The fact that they haven’t fixed this, that’s annoying,” said resident Heath Gaston.

The USA TODAY NETWORK analysis showed three of every four water systems that exceeded the lead standard from 2012 to 2015 served 500 people or less. They often lack the resources and staff expertise of larger systems. “Some of these small systems don’t even have a full-time operator,” said Taft, of the state water regulators association. They may rely on one person, responsible for several systems, he said. In the case of schools, the same staff that does building maintenance may be managing the water system.

But nearly 70 of the systems with excessive lead findings during the past four years each provide water to at least 10,000 people. They include:

Passaic Valley Water Commission, New Jersey: More than 315,000 people are served by the water system in the industrialized area of northern New Jersey with a history of other pollution crises. It failed to meet EPA’s lead standards during two testing periods last year and one in 2012. Commission officials said a $135 million construction project is underway to improve corrosion control. The utility officials also are publicly encouraging more people to participate in its lead-testing program.

New Bedford, Mass.: This municipal water system, which serves about 95,000 in a sea port city about an hour south of Boston, has been cited for excessive lead in 2014 and early 2015, EPA data show. Ron Labelle, the city’s public infrastructure commissioner, said the area’s housing is among the oldest in the Northeast and some still have lead service lines. A consultant has helped improve the system’s anti-corrosion treatments, he said, and the city passed its most recent testing in December. Additional testing will be done this spring.

Bangor Water District, Maine: More than 28,000 people receive water from this system, which exceeded EPA’s lead standards three times in 2012 and 2013. Operators tweaked chemicals used in its corrosion control program, and have been in compliance since.

**Failure to notify people**

When testing does reveal high lead levels, the USA TODAY NETWORK found many people were not warned as required. Of the 180 cited for failing to notify the public, almost half were cited more than once, records show.

In Ohio, in the past year, seven water systems serving a combined 8,800 customers failed to notify residents of potential lead contamination within 60 days as required.
Tests found excessive lead last summer at homes in the village of Sebring. The water system didn’t alert customers until January, after Flint started making national headlines. The Ohio EPA placed two employees on leave while investigating. State records show six other Ohio water systems also did not provide timely warnings to residents after failing lead tests. The systems supply water to mobile home parks, a subdivision, an arboretum and a church and its day care.

In Arizona, several water systems that found unsafe amounts of lead in drinking water samples taken several years ago failed to act until February, after the USA TODAY NETWORK began requesting data about lead levels in drinking water.

The principal at a boarding school near the Navajo Reservation was unaware until February that water from a faucet in a church at the property tested high for lead in 2013. Operators of a small water utility near the Mexico border and a small community system in eastern Arizona both had high lead test results in 2013. One said he didn’t know any action was needed. The other conceded the lack of action was an oversight.

Misael Cabrera, director Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, acknowledged lapses in following up with some water systems. Cabrera said he’s since asked all water providers for high lead levels to notify their customers. His department also is creating a system to better track compliance.

**Without action, issues fester**

Without strong action by regulators, problems can fester, especially in small systems with limited resources.

In southeastern Oklahoma’s Latimer County, a rural water system serving about 1,500 people has had excessive lead levels during seven testing periods since 2013, EPA data show. The Latimer County Rural Water District #2 failed more tests in the past three years than any water system in the country.

Little has been done to fix the problem. The Latimer #2 district points its finger at its water supplier, and the supplier blames homeowners for not replacing bad plumbing.

“There’s nothing we can do,” said Linda Petty, office manager for the Latimer #2 district, which doesn’t treat its own water. Latimer buys its water from the nearby Sardis Lake Water Authority. “We’re at their mercy,” she said.

“The water that we have coming out of the lake does not have lead in it,” said Willie Williams, the Sardis Lake system’s operator. “They have some houses in their system that have horrendous plumbing. There’s not a single thing Latimer #2 can do about it and not a single thing I can do about it.”

Customers received notices of the lead issue in their bills, the water system and residents said. County officials say they have not gotten calls from concerned residents.

“I haven’t heard anybody saying anything about it,” said John Medders, a county commissioner whose home is on the system. He recalled getting a notice in the fall. “Most of the time I just throw mine in the trash. I don’t pay much mind to it.”

Water regulators at the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality said they now plan to meet with both water systems and send state engineers to Latimer and 18 other water systems that don’t comply with lead-contamination limits.

“The Flint, Michigan, situation has really opened our eyes to what’s going on,” said Patty Thompson, engineering manager for the department’s public water supply group.

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First visit by US president since Coolidge in 1928

Gregory Korte 3/20/16

Washington. It's a day full of that might be the called the "Greek 2." That's the Greek 2 amid high authorities require (and data) that will meet with past policies, properties, policies, which has been coined with social groups to the main reasons for the falling prices of home prices and services.

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Whenever Jamison Rich got thirsty after gym or recess, he took a drink from the nearest water fountain at his elementary school.

Only last month did his family learn that the water bubbling out of some fountains contained high levels of lead, a notorious toxin that can silently damage developing brains and slow growth in little bodies like his.

Recently, a blood test on the 7-year-old found more than twice the average level of lead for young children, even though as far as anyone knows he's never come in contact with lead paint or tainted soil.

Jamison’s school, Caroline Elementary in Ithaca, NY, is one of hundreds across the nation where children were exposed to water containing excessive amounts of an element doctors agree is unsafe at any level, a USA TODAY NETWORK investigation found. An analysis of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data showed about 350 schools and day-care centers failed lead tests a total of about 470 times from 2012 through 2015.

That represents nearly 20% of the water systems nationally testing above the agency’s “action level” of 15 parts per billion.

One water sample at a Maine elementary school was 41 times higher. And a sink in a music-room bathroom at Caroline Elementary tested this year at 5,000 ppb of lead, results released by the school system show.

That’s the cutoff where the EPA labels a substance “hazardous waste.”

“It’s a scary thing. Nobody expects to have this in their schools,” said Jamison’s mom, Nicole Rich. “Who knows how big the problem actually is?”

Researchers say it could be very, very big. But at this point it’s impossible to know how big because the federal government requires only about 10% of the nation’s schools and a tiny fraction of day cares — the 8,225 facilities that run their own water systems — to test for lead at all.

The EPA estimates that about 90,000 schools in 49 states and the District of Columbia are covered by the program.

“Part of the problem is that only a small percentage of schools have been sampled,” said Steve Rapuano, director of the Water Systems & Enforcement Division at the EPA.

Jamison’s school is in New York, one of the states where the EPA says schools need to test more. The number of tests increased by 63% in the past year, but the state still ranks 48th in the country for testing.

“I was hiding a very big secret for 13 years!” Nia has the consumer business and Inge Thulin says she sees a recession.

“OBAMA BEGINS HISTORIC CUBA VISIT

$2.00 THE NATIONAL'S NEWS

LADY MICHELLE AND THE MIGRANT CHILDREN

RUBEN BLANQUET, DETROIT FREE PRESS

Nicole Rich, 34, helps her children Jamison, 7, and Jersey, 9, do homework in Ithaca, NY.

ROMAIN BLANQUET, DETROIT FREE PRESS

LEAD IN YOUR WATER

A USA TODAY NETWORK INVESTIGATION

Lead taints drinking water in hundreds of schools, day cares across USA

Laura Ungar, USA TODAY
public schools and half a million child-care facilities are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act because they depend on water sources such as municipal utilities expected to test their own water. That means parents have no assurance lead isn’t seeping into children’s water from a school building’s pipes, solder or fixtures.

In fact, many schools that have tested for lead voluntarily have found it, hinting at the true scope of the problem.

“There’s a regulatory black hole when it comes to schools and day-care centers,” said Yanna Lambrinidou, a Virginia Tech researcher who studies lead in water nationally. “In some ways, it’s an official endorsement of exposure to lead and large-scale health harms that go undetected.”

Babies and children also are left vulnerable at schools and day cares required to test for lead. The USA TODAY NETWORK investigation found spotty enforcement from the EPA and some state governments, as well school leaders’ failures to test as often as required, notify parents about problems in a timely way or fix problems immediately in many cases.

Doctors stress that lead is a cumulative poison that builds up in the body and comes from several sources.

A groundbreaking study from Bruce Lanphear, a professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia who studied lead exposure among children in Rochester, NY, found that about 20% was attributed to water, 10% to 15% to contaminated soil and 20% to 30% from other sources such as paint dust. He adds that many variables and sources should be considered, and not everything can be explained.

Compounding the problem:

• Lead-tainted water isn’t used just for drinking and washing. It’s often used for cooking school lunches — where it can wind up in foods like pasta — or making infant formula, posing a particular risk to babies because they consume so much water compared to their size.

• Lead concentrations can rise as water goes unused and stays in contact with plumbing since schools and day cares often are vacant for long stretches. Also, lead particles tend to release sporadically, so a child can go days drinking from a contaminated water fountain before ingesting the toxin.

“It’s like Russian roulette,” Lambrinidou said.

• Blood testing for lead poisoning is typically done in babies, not school-aged children. Symptoms usually don’t show up until dangerous levels have accumulated and even then can be vague, so they often are missed until the damage — such as lowered IQ, behavior problems and developmental delays — has been done.

**Widespread threat, mixed response**

Given the dangers, the EPA recommends that schools and day-care centers test for lead even if they’re not required to under the agency’s Lead and Copper Rule and work to reduce the toxin. In an email response to questions from USA TODAY NETWORK, the EPA says these facilities serve sensitive populations, so the agency and states prioritize assisting those that test above actionable levels by helping
them collect samples and look into practices and equipment that could be causing high lead levels, such as old plumbing.

But a growing chorus of researchers, activists, parents and school officials say this isn’t enough and that all schools and day cares should have to test for lead.

“Our children are drinking this water every day,” Rich said. “The fact it doesn’t always have to be tested kind of blows my mind.”

“EPA regulations have not moved forward with the science,” said President and CEO Ruth Ann Norton of Green and Healthy Homes Initiative, an anti-lead advocacy group. “These are our children. This is poison. ... It’s a toxin being ingested, and that should never be OK under any circumstances.”

Among schools and day cares required to test, the USA TODAY NETWORK analysis found problematic lead levels in 42 states. If more than 10% of samples are above 15 ppb, that triggers a water system to take action.

States with the most were Maine, with 44 samples taken from drinking fountains and faucets showing high lead levels at 26 facilities; Pennsylvania, with 43 samples testing high among 37 facilities; and New Jersey, with 34 high readings among 23 facilities. Some schools and day cares failed lead tests four or even five times.

Marc Edwards, a Virginia Tech civil engineering professor who helped uncover the water crisis in Flint, Mich., said Maine has particularly corrosive water, which can dissolve lead from plumbing systems. Regional School Unit 57, a rural district in southern Maine, has failed lead tests nine times among four schools in recent years with one sample registering 635 ppb in 2013 at Waterboro Elementary School, located a half hour’s drive from Kennebunkport.

The district took Waterboro off its well and hooked it to municipal water three years ago, put in a water-filtration system at another school and replaced problematic faucets at several schools, Superintendent John Davis said. The system tests for lead regularly and notifies parents quickly.

“Typically, schools are very responsive,” said Roger Crouse, Maine’s drinking water program director.

But responses to lead problems are not always so efficient.

In Bucks County, Pa., one water sample in 2013 tested more than 14 times above the actionable level at Quakertown Christian School’s preschool campus, a rural school in a small borough 50 miles north of Philadelphia. But not until two years later did school leaders turn off the drinking fountains and bring in bottled water for its 60 students and staff members.

Pennsylvania’s state environmental protection department didn’t suggest doing so earlier, and it wasn’t required, said Bill Kirk, the school’s interim executive director. The school took state officials’ advice to change a faucet.

Lead tests taken in September again found high levels of lead. School officials sent a letter to families saying they were trying to minimize lead exposure by providing bottled water and replacing a well head pump and piping.

In Arizona, the USA TODAY NETWORK found that water providers didn’t always conduct the required follow-up tests or notify customers when tests were flagged for high levels of lead.

A school district near Sedona didn’t notify parents until February that a water fountain and a faucet in a preschool room tested in 2013 for high levels of lead in the water. A faucet in a church at a boarding school near the Navajo Reservation triggered an exceedance in 2013, but again no additional testing was done until last year, and no one was notified until last month.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality didn’t tell the boarding school to act until after a reporter asked for information about lead tests. The principal of Holbrook Seventh Day Adventist Indian School — located near Navajo Country and surrounded by quiet, windy, high-desert lands — said the first he had heard about a possible lead problem was a phone call in February from a state staffer.

“It was a bombshell,” Principal Pedro Ojeda said, adding that the caller said, “You’re going to get a letter, and this is going to get reported to the paper and even USA TODAY.”

The school contracted with a private
consultant to test the water and submit results to the state, Ojeda said. Staff was not aware of the test results.

Tests were done after a volunteer’s child fell ill with lead-poisoning symptoms, but they found no problems at that point, he said.

The elementary school near Sedona similarly received a letter from Arizona environmental officials about the results of its water sample showing high lead contamination just a couple of weeks after the USA TODAY NETWORK began asking questions. Although a follow-up test came back clear, that school is replacing pipes in the problem area.

Administrators at both schools said they plan to test for lead more often.

**Parents told late**

Ithaca City School District, where young Jamison is in second grade, also failed to comply with EPA regulations — in this case parents weren’t told about problems quickly so they could protect their kids.

The 5,500-student district is located in a small city that also is home to Cornell University and Ithaca College. Two district schools, Caroline and Enfield elementaries, run their own water systems and are required to test for lead while the other 10 are not because they are connected to municipal water.

A total of four samples from Caroline and Enfield tested above the EPA action level in August and two in follow-up tests in January, according to fact sheets from the county health department.

Even though the first test results came back in September, parents didn’t learn of the problem until February despite requirements to notify the public within 30 days.

Superintendent Luvelle Brown blames “internal and external communication problems” but wouldn’t elaborate except to say personnel issues were involved. He said he wasn’t told about results of the August tests until months afterward and shared them days after he learned them — adding he understands the gravity of the issue, since “my child drinks out of the faucets every day.”

Parents complained about the delay at community meetings, and the district tested the water again at sinks and water fountains throughout Caroline and Enfield, finding numerous levels greater than 100 ppb, according to results the school system released. The highest was the 5,000 ppb sample from the music-room bathroom sink at Caroline.

Officials turned off drinking water sources at the two schools, made bottled water available throughout the district and began looking into what went wrong with the notification process. They also started to review water-sampling data from 2005 for Caroline and Enfield, as well as other district schools not required to test, Brown said.
He shared plans to test all district buildings and vowed to fix any problems, “whatever it takes.”

Amid the turmoil, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., pushed for help from the EPA and recently announced the agency was sending lead experts to help the school system by assisting with tests of the water sources at Caroline and Enfield. In a March 3 letter to the community, the superintendent wrote, “Recent sampling procedures may have produced inaccurate results,” and the health department has advised re-testing.

Parents are incensed.

“My trust is completely gone in the district,” said Rich, who has two children at Caroline and a middle-schooler. The notification delay “took away our choice as parents to provide an alternative.”

Parent Melissa Hoffman agrees. She has three children in the district, and said her daughter, Sareanda, used to drink every day from a water fountain in her kindergarten classroom that measured high for lead.

“No amount of lead is safe,” Hoffman said. “We just don’t know what has been done to our children.”

Her 10-year-old Asyra, a fourth-grader, also drank from a water fountain that tested high for lead, she said. She didn’t show any signs of sickness, but Sareanda used to come home with a rash around her mouth and so tired she needed a long nap.

Doctors say fatigue can be a sign of lead poisoning but a rash isn’t typical although Flint residents also have reported them.

Hoffman said tests for lead in her daughters’ blood came back normal, but she’s still concerned because doctors say lead can be missed if too much time elapses between the exposure and the blood test. Both girls are now drinking bottled water, and Hoffman said Sareanda no longer comes home from school exhausted, and her rash has cleared up.

But Rich wonders about long-term harm to Jamison. The active boy, who runs around a lot and often gets thirsty, was the only one of her children found to have lead in his blood. He’s at twice the average for lead in his blood and just barely under the level that the federal government considers elevated.

Rich said her water at home tested below 15 ppb for lead and she has no lead paint there, so the likely culprit is the water at school.

**Voluntary testing uncovers lead**

Observers say high lead levels among the mostly small schools and day-care centers required to test are alarming enough. But voluntary testing at larger schools provides troubling evidence that the lead problem may be much bigger than what the EPA exceedance numbers suggest.

Longstanding lead issues have arisen in some of the nation’s biggest cities, including Washington, D.C.; and Baltimore. According to a 2010 article by Lambrindou, Edwards and a co-author in the journal New Solutions, Baltimore City Public Schools first became aware of lead-in-water contamination in 1992. Drinking fountains were shut off but school administrators unaware of the problem later turned them back on.

After future testing also found high levels of lead, the school system decided on a long-term strategy to use bottled water.

Early this month, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection advised Newark Public Schools to use alternate drinking-water sources after voluntary tests found elevated levels of lead in 30 of 67 district schools. Measurements ranged from 16 to 558 ppb, according to 2015-16 results posted on the department’s website. The school system temporarily shut off all drinking fountains in affected schools, posted warnings in bathrooms not to drink water from faucets, and brought in water coolers and bottled water.

Other schools not required to test have decided to do so in wake of the Flint crisis, uncovering problems of their own.

The Indiana School for the Deaf in Indianapolis sampled its water this year “out of an abundance of caution” and found two water fountains with high levels: one initially testing at 130 ppb and the other at 519 ppb. Both were taken out of service with plans to replace them.

Binghamton City Schools in New York also voluntarily decided to correct lead-in-water problems in February, prompted in
part because of issues in nearby Ithaca. Superintendent Marion Martinez had learned the district completed testing in 2013, but nothing was done about locations found to in excess of 15 ppb, and the final report included no recommendations. After Martinez got a copy of the report, the district shut down seven drinking-water sources flagged as having high lead levels. Five have since been repaired, flushed, re-tested and come in below 15 ppb, and two more remain shut off.

The district now plans to label which are safe to use for drinking

“We don’t have a state or federal legal requirement to test the water, but we have a moral requirement,” Martinez said. “Going into the future, we commit ourselves to testing our drinking water sources every three years. We are obligating ourselves to do that.”

**Getting the lead out**

EPA officials say they not only encourage voluntary testing but provide guidance to schools and day cares that want to do it while also helping those required to test stay in compliance.

Plumbing materials that contain lead make the agency’s goal of zero lead unreachable, officials said. Regulations help water systems move in the right direction by requiring those with problems to control corrosion and reduce lead in tap water “to the extent feasible.”

In a way, “the violations are the good news. Those schools are testing” and correcting problems, Virginia Tech’s Edwards said. “The ones you should be worried about are ... the vast majority of schools not required to test. There, you can have any level of lead.”

Lambrinidou agreed, adding that regulations are fine as far as they go, but there is “a nationwide lack of enforcement.” Many schools also don’t fully understand how lead gets into water or how to test correctly for it, she said.

Even the way action-level exceedances are calculated is problematic because up to 10% of samples can be above 15 ppb of lead, which “allows for 10% of (locations tested) to dispense any concentration of lead whatever,” Lambrinidou said.

Another obstacle to dealing with lead-in-water problems is that permanent solutions can be expensive.

The tiny one-school Klondike Independent School District, which sits amid a cotton patch in Lamesa, Texas, plans to replace its entire water system at a cost of $600,000. Superintendent Steve McLaren called the expense “a big chunk of our money.”

McLaren said he’s concerned about how high lead levels might affect students and understands the need to take action.

“I’m always concerned about their health,” he said. “I think we’re doing the best we can with the finances we have.”

Conley Elementary, a rural New Jersey school with five action-triggering water samples from 2012 through 2014, tried several fixes before finding one that worked. School leaders shut down water fountains and cafeteria sinks and began using bottled water for drinking and cooking, attempted to make the water less corrosive, then
finally decided to re-pipe the entire system out to the well at a cost of $187,000.

Edwards said he understands many facilities are strapped for cash, but “there’s a law, and we have to follow it.” He points out that not all remedies are expensive: Some water filters cost only $20, and even designating taps as drinking or non-drinking can be temporary fixes.

Norton, with the anti-lead group, said she would like to see tax credits, grants and loans made available to schools and day cares seeking to tackle lead problems because the human cost of failing to address them is too high.

“We see learning difficulties, hyperactivity, developmental delays,” said Marcie Billings, a pediatrician with Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. “Any damage is irreversible.”

And while the dangers of lead are clear, some researchers say it’s not clear how big a part lead-tainted water plays in overall lead exposure, especially since so many schools and day cares don’t have to test for it.

“We don’t really know the collateral damage that’s being caused by lead in water,” Norton said. “We must address this as a society. We’re all better off with children who can read better because they haven’t been harmed by lead. We all benefit when children are healthy.”

In News

Aleppo civilians facing execution
U.N. says Syrian forces killing women, children

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President-elect pledges 'no new deals'

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Doth hits record; 'no new deals'
President-elect pledges ethics watchdogs

U.N. says Syrian forces facing execution
Aleppo civilians

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4 MILLION AMERICANS COULD BE DRINKING TOXIC WATER

Brookline traps millions in rural areas with poisoned or untested tap water

Laura Unger and Mark Nichols USA TODAY

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Published December 14, 2016
PAGES 1A, 4A, 5A
4 million Americans could be drinking toxic water and would never know

Laura Ungar and Mark Nichols, USA TODAY Network

RANGER, Texas — The leaders of this former oil boomtown never gave 2-year-old Adam Walton a chance to avoid the poison. It came in city water, delivered to his family’s tap through pipes nearly a century old. For almost a year, the little boy bathed in lead-tainted water and ate food cooked in it. As he grew into a toddler — when he should have been learning to talk — he drank tap water containing a toxin known to ravage a child’s developing brain. Adam’s parents didn’t know about the danger until this fall.

Officials at City Hall knew long before then, according to local and state records. So did state and federal government regulators who are paid to make sure drinking water in Texas and across the nation is clean. Ranger
and Texas officials were aware of a citywide lead problem for two years -- one the city still hasn’t fixed and one the Waltons first learned about in a September letter to residents. The city and state even knew, from recent tests, that water in the Walton family’s cramped, one-bedroom rental house near the railroad tracks was carrying sky-high levels of lead.

Destiny and John Walton got their first inkling of a problem when blood tests in June detected high levels of lead in their son’s growing body. They first learned that their tap water contained lead — about 28 times the federal limit — when a USA TODAY Network reporter told them in early November.

Millions of Americans face similar risks because the nation’s drinking-water enforcement system doesn’t make small utilities play by the same safety rules as everyone else, a USA TODAY Network investigation has found.

Tiny utilities - those serving only a few thousand people or less - don’t have to treat water to prevent lead contamination until after lead is found. Even when they skip safety tests or fail to treat water after they find lead, federal and state regulators often do not force them to comply with the law.

USA TODAY Network journalists spent 2016 reviewing millions of records from the Environmental Protection Agency and all 50 states, visiting small communities across the country and interviewing more than 120 people stuck using untested or lead-tainted tap water.

The investigation found:

• About 100,000 people get their drinking water from utilities that discovered high lead but failed to treat the water to remove it. Dozens of utilities took more than a year to formulate a treatment plan and even longer to begin treatment.

• Some 4 million Americans get water from small operators who skipped required tests or did not conduct the tests properly, violating a cornerstone of federal safe drinking water laws. The testing is required because, without it, utilities, regulators and people drinking the water can’t know if it’s safe. In more than 2,000 communities, lead tests were skipped more than once. Hundreds repeatedly failed to properly test for five or more years.

• About 850 small water utilities with a documented history of lead contamination — places where state and federal regulators are supposed to pay extra attention — have failed to properly test for lead at least once since 2010.

This two-tiered system exists in both law and practice. State and federal water-safety officials told USA TODAY Network reporters that regulators are more lenient with small water systems because they lack resources, deeming some lost causes when they don’t have the money, expertise or motivation to fix problems. The nation’s Safe Drinking Water Act allows less-trained, often amateur, people to operate tiny water systems even though the risks for people drinking the water are the same.

Officials in West Virginia, for example, labeled more than a dozen systems “orphans” because they didn’t have owners or operators. Enforcement efforts for those utilities amounted to little more than a continuous stream of warning letters as utilities failed to test year after year. All the while, residents continued drinking untested — and potentially contaminated — water.

“At the end of the day, it creates two universes of people,” said water expert Yanna Lambrinidou, an affiliate faculty member at Virginia Tech. “One is the universe of people who are somewhat protected from lead. ... Then we have those people served by small water systems, who are treated by

**100,000**

people get their drinking water from utilities that discovered high lead but failed to treat the water to remove it

**4 MILLION**

Americans get water from small operators who skipped required tests or did not conduct the tests properly

**$5 MILLION**

The cost to test every small water utility that missed even one test
the regulations as second-class citizens.”

All of this endangers millions of people across the country, mostly in remote and rural communities. Utilities like East Moorningsport Water, serving part of a bayou town of about 800 people, where drinking water went untested for more than five years. Or Coal Mountain, W.Va., a remote 118-person outpost where a retired coal miner pours bleach into untreated water at the system’s wellhead in hope of keeping it clean. Or Orange Center School outside Fresno, Calif., where for more than a decade regulators let about 320 grade-school kids drink water that had tested high for lead.

Individually, the communities served by small utilities seem tiny. But together, the number of people getting lead-contaminated drinking water, or water not properly tested for lead, since 2010 is about 5 million.

Virginia Tech’s Marc Edwards, one of the nation’s top experts on lead in drinking water who helped identify the crisis in Flint, Mich., laments that people in America’s forgotten places — rural outposts, post-industrial communities and poor towns — are most at risk from the dangers of lead exposure, such as irreversible brain damage, lowered IQ, behavioral problems and language delays.

Edwards said the effects of lead poisoning could make it even more difficult for families in these communities to climb out of poverty: “I’m worried about their kids,” he said. “The risk of permanent harm here is horrifying. These are America’s children.”

The Waltons fear lead has already harmed their son. At an age when other kids use dozens of words, Adam says just three: “mama,” “dada” and “no.” Destiny and John wish they would have known about the lead earlier so they could have protected him.

“What’s going to happen if my son’s lead levels keep rising? What if the kid next door gets way sicker than my son? What’s Ranger going to do then?” Destiny asked. “They’ve known about it for years now. ... Are they going to fix it?”

Tiny Flint

Where everything breaks down at once

Perhaps the best illustration of what can happen when everything breaks down at once is Ranger, where high lead and government inaction have converged in a pervasive contamination problem experts compared to a “tiny Flint.”

Ranger’s water system dates to the city’s heyday nearly 100 years ago, when the discovery of oil attracted a population that historians say reached 30,000. Ranger is now a barren place with 2,500 people, abandoned buildings and a lonely Main Street where a mural of a steer-wrangling cowboy near an oil well fades away like the city.

With ever-shrinking tax rolls and median household income at about half the national average, there’s little money to shore up a decaying infrastructure. Leaks spring daily.

Many residents rely on bottled water. They’ve heard through the grapevine that the city’s water might be unhealthy. They can see for themselves it’s not always clean. While lead is colorless and odorless, algae in the water is not.

“Some days, it’s more brown than green. It smells sort of like a sewer,” said Vietnam veteran Bill Brister, who spends about $70 a month on bottled water. “We don’t even give the dogs tap water.”

Three years ago, the city found excessive levels of copper. Nine months after that, three of 20 sites tested over the limit of 15 parts per billion of lead. Under federal law, both required immediate action, but documents show the city waited until this fall to start planning to control corrosion.
Testing this September found five sites above the limit for lead, the Walton home topping the list at 418 parts per billion. The federal limit is 15.

Similar scenarios play out in hundreds of mostly struggling communities — cities built on boom-bust industries like oil and coal, isolated rural places and mobile home parks housing the poorest people in town.

Ranger is one of about 130 water systems since 2010 that failed to take timely action, and one of dozens that took a year or more to start the treatment process.

City Manager Chad Roberts said Texas environmental officials pushed hard this fall after USA TODAY Network reporters visited Ranger and began asking questions. State officials insist the push came after a weekly review found that Ranger met EPA criteria for the state to take formal enforcement action.

Ranger took its first step toward reducing lead in November — nearly three years later — by giving the state a corrosion-control study that called for adjusting the pH of the water. State officials deemed the plan insufficient, however, and are working with the city to improve it.

As the city formulates its plan, residents continue to drink water that might be dangerous.

A boil notice was in effect in early November when Kay Hodges, 23, said she drank straight from the tap because she was nine months’ pregnant, dehydrated and out of bottled water. “I got really sick. I was throwing up all night,” she said.

Hodges lives with her fiancé and young children in a low-income housing complex called Austin Acres. A tap at the complex has repeatedly tested high for lead, most recently at more than twice the federal limit. Hodges figures she should now get checked for the toxin.

Others fear lead exposure, too. Anita Baker, a 79-year-old colon cancer survivor in Austin Acres, has been using city water for cooking and making coffee but plans to stop after learning from a reporter that boiling the water concentrates the lead.
The Waltons — who squeeze into their one-bedroom home by putting the master bed in the living room — also drank lots of city water, in iced tea, Kool-Aid, diluted juice and by itself. Adam’s highest blood lead reading was more than three times the federal cutoff to be considered elevated, and his 1-year-old brother, Andrew, also had slightly elevated lead levels.

Texas environmental officials say they have taken steps to speed Ranger’s response. They sent experts to Ranger, referred the city to the EPA for formal enforcement in March, issued new citations in October and fined the city about $3,000.

The city raised water rates to pay for improvements and now promises to replace more of the old water lines, increase testing and seek grants for more upgrades.

“We are good with the state right now,” Mayor Joe Pilgrim said, “and that’s all that matters.”

Still, residents may have to wait years for clean water. After the state approves a reworked corrosion-control study, Ranger has two years before it must start treating its water. By then, Adam Walton will be almost ready for kindergarten.

Double standard
Playing by a different set of rules

It’s easy to see why a place like Ranger winds up with toxic water when you compare it to a typical large water system like the one in Louisville, Ky.

Louisville Water has about 435 full-time staffers, including a director of water quality and production with a Ph.D. in environmental engineering. Ranger has seven public works employees.

Louisville Water has an operating and maintenance budget of $127 million. Ranger’s entire city budget is $3.2 million.

The top salary for water quality employees at Louisville Water is $141,276. Most of Ranger’s public works department employees earn from $8.50 to $12 an hour.

Some small utilities are even worse off.

In Colorado, near Black Canyon, the man in charge of providing safe water to 335 people is a farmer who spends most of his time tending to livestock, wheat, oats and barley.

In West Texas, at Klondike Independent School District, water safety is handled by Superintendent Steve McLaren, whose first job is running a one-building school system serving 260 students. He wears many hats in the district amid cotton fields; he’s been known to drive a school bus from time to time.

McLaren acknowledged he skipped required testing for lead and copper in fall 2014 because “some things just slip by.” When Klondike did test last year, it found excessive lead in both rounds of testing.

Generally, the bar for running tiny water systems is low. Certification for hands-on operators varies by state and typically involves passing an exam and getting ongoing continuing education credits. Some states require licensing but with varying qualifications. Minimum requirements in Texas, for instance, are a high school diploma or GED and a training course in basic water operations. No experience necessary.

“You might have to get more training to run a hot dog stand than a small water
system,” said Paul Schwartz with the Campaign for Lead Free Water, a group of people and organizations working to get lead out of drinking water.

Many states, and the EPA, offer extra guidance and instruction. But not everyone avails themselves of this help, leaving many small operators with “a complete lack of training,” Lambrinidou said. “Sometimes, they’re cheating and they don’t know they’re cheating.”

Some government funding is available for struggling utilities. EPA’s Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, which includes a state contribution, has provided $32.5 billion through 2016 to water systems that applied for help. Another EPA program awards millions each year to non-profit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to small, public water systems. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also offers loans and grants.

Edwards and others say the need far outstrips the money, and loans aren’t helpful to utilities that can’t pay them back. An EPA assessment from 2013 estimates infrastructure needs for small water systems will total $64.5 billion over 20 years. The revolving fund’s 2016 allocation, for systems of all sizes, was less than $1 billion, and a Congressional Research Service report on the fund in November concluded that “a substantial gap remains between financing needs and available funds.”

Recognizing resource constraints, the federal government lets small water systems play by more lenient rules.

Scattered throughout EPA regulations on lead and copper are specific provisions for small water systems. While utilities serving 50,000 or more people must always control corrosion, for example, smaller systems don’t have to even plan for such treatment when lead is below the federal limit for two consecutive six-month periods. And they can discontinue treatment once lead drops below the limit.

Utilities serving 3,300 or fewer can, if they meet certain criteria, test for lead as little as once every nine years.

Experts say such regulations make it easy for lead problems to go undetected and uncorrected in the very places that are most vulnerable to contamination.

“You might think we have a lead in water law,” Edwards said. “What we have is a national joke.”

Untested water

4 million living with an unknown

A cornerstone of those 25-year-old lead regulations is testing. But the USA TODAY Network found that 9,000 small water systems together serving almost 4 million people failed to test properly for lead in the past six years, meaning the toxin could be there without anyone knowing. More than a quarter of those systems had repeat lead-testing violations.

EPA acknowledges it gives higher priority to immediate public health issues like acute contamination than testing violations.

Money is a factor in skipping lead tests, which can cost around $50 per tap. Utilities must test from five to 20 locations, depending on how many customers they serve. A USA TODAY Network analysis found it would cost about $1.2 million to check the water served by every small utility that failed to test twice since 2010. Lead testing for every small water utility that missed even one test would cost around $5 million.

Ranger admits in a letter to residents to three years of skipped or incomplete tests. Roberts, who started as city manager in the spring, blamed lack of expertise and previous neglect, saying “the ball got dropped for sure.”

It also got dropped at Orange Center School in California, which skipped testing for nine years — even after finding excessive lead in 2003. In the rural neighborhood outside Fresno, officials in charge let the kids keep drinking the water for more than a decade.

State officials threatened to fine the school, but records show no more lead tests were done until 2012 and no action was taken. Three of those tests again found high lead. Two more years went by before California officials ordered the school to stop using the water and began shipping bottled water to students, while the school waits to be connected to the much-larger Fresno water system.
Customers of East Mooringsport Water in Louisiana, are also waiting to hook up to a larger water system after at least five years of skipped tests.

“Honestly, we just didn’t have the money to do (testing),” said Edward “Pat” Turnley, who distributes monthly water bills to the 90 East Mooringsport customers. “We’re barely hanging on here.”

The state cracked down several times, ordering the district to test three years ago and fining the community more than $43,500. But little changed. Finally, in late June, the state tested nine homes itself, and found lead contamination in two. More testing will need to be done to determine the extent of the problem.

East Mooringsport buys treated water from the nearby town of Blanchard, then stores it in old tanks. Resident Gladys McCauslin suspects sediment in the tanks is what makes her tap water brownish and gritty. Residents are warned to boil it before drinking or cooking.

“It makes me feel like I’m in a Third World country,” said McCauslin, 75.

McCauslin hopes things will change when Blanchard, which has a new, $17 million water treatment plant, acquires her community’s water system. As she waits for the merger, she keeps doing what she’s done for years — paying the bill for untested tap water while shelling out extra money for bottled water to drink and filtered, purified water for bathing.

Residents in remote Coal Mountain, W.Va., have gone as long as anyone can remember with untested, questionable water. No one knows what contaminants it might contain.

Orphan systems
Regulators have given up on some places

Their wellhead is housed near a church, in a shed cluttered with empty bleach bottles. They’ve been left behind by Raven Kenneda, a 65-year-old with a salt-and-pepper
mustache and a baseball cap, who pours bleach into his community’s water once in a while to keep it clean.

“It’s just stuff I’ve learned down through the years,” he said from his front-porch swing as his granddaughter sipped bottled water.

Though he’s no water expert, he concedes, “Someone’s got to do it.”

State and federal governments have pretty much given up on enforcing safe-drinking-water rules here and in similarly tough cases, leaving residents to fend for themselves.

Coal Mountain’s tap water comes from a coal company well abandoned in the 1980s. Water is pumped up the mountainside to an old storage tank hidden amid tangled trees, then flows down to homes. It’s the subject of 19 water-testing violations since 1988, the most in the nation.

“We don’t know what’s in it,” said Mila Darnell, 62, who is raising two 17-year-old grandsons with her retired coal miner husband. “I’m very concerned about lead or whatever else could be in there.”

No doubt something is awry; the water stains the Darnells’ clothes, stops up their shower head and sometimes smells like fish. Although they won’t drink it, they do use it for cooking — boiling it first and hoping no one gets sick.

West Virginian officials say they can’t do much beyond sending out advisories and issuing notices about water-testing violations because Coal Mountain has no owner or operator. The state labels Coal Mountain and about 15 other utilities “orphan systems.”

“This happens, actually, across the country. We try to work with them, but the problem is finding someone who’s responsible,” said Walter Ivey, director of the West Virginia health department’s Office of Environmental Health Services.

One option is for states to test the water. But Jon Capacasa, director of EPA’s Region 3 Water Protection Division, said that the law calls for utilities to monitor for lead and report results to states, and that the obligation lies with them.

When utilities can’t or won’t, however, they often face little if any real punishment. Notices and orders were EPA’s weapons against Coal Mountain’s lead-testing violations for five years — after which nothing changed and West Virginia asked that no further federal action be taken.

Water-quality advocates say residents deserve better.

Government “owes it to these people to at least provide clean drinking water,” said Wyoming County Clerk Mike Goode, adding that the county is working on a proposal to help Coal Mountain. “It’s bad. These people live in America. They have a right to good water.”

But Mila Darnell laments that such rights don’t always extend to poor, rural Americans like her.

“We’re a forgotten people,” she said. “It hurts to feel ... like you just don’t count.”

‘No responsible party’
Accountable officials minimizing danger

Roberts, the city manager, downplayed the danger from Ranger’s water. Roberts said small children and pregnant women probably shouldn’t drink it (as the city said in a letter to residents). He said overall, “I don’t see a problem with drinking (it.) I drink it. ... I don’t think it’s a health alert serious enough for an emergency.”

Roberts blamed much of the lead problem on homeowners’ pipes, although he acknowledged the city’s distribution system contains lead pipes as well.

Pilgrim, Ranger’s mayor, agreed the water isn’t unsafe, saying his city “has never put any of their people in danger. … It’s not an ongoing medical disaster to anyone in town for any reason.”

They are far from the only officials to minimize water problems.

Kentucky’s Peter Goodmann, who directs the division of water there, used a similar rationale to defend many years of inaction when a tiny water system without an owner refused to test for contaminants. “There’s not much we could do because there’s no responsible party,” Goodmann said of Kettle Island Water, which was recently downgraded from a public water system because it’s gotten so small. “Nobody’s dying there, and there doesn’t seem to be any public health effects.”
The EPA would not allow senior officials including Peter Grevatt, director of the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, to be interviewed. The agency would respond only in writing to questions, saying it’s revising lead regulations, working with states to strengthen protections and oversight, and remains committed to “vigorous civil and criminal enforcement to protect public health.” On Nov. 30, the EPA released a drinking water “action plan” that includes proposed steps to help tiny water utilities comply with the drinking water laws, such as guidance to help them find money for needed improvements and updated certification guidelines for people operating them.

For now, lead continues to taint tap water in places like Ranger. Katelyn Peters, who lives next door to the Waltons, doesn’t see anything changing soon.

“This is where I was raised. This is where I was planning on raising my kids,” she said, watching three of her four kids chase each other in the front yard, wondering if the water could be slowly poisoning the town’s kids. “Now, I’m terrified. I would live anywhere else.”

Contributing: Lex Talamo of The Shreveport (La.) Times and Caitlin McGlade. Talamo reported from Mooringsport, La. McGlade reported from Ranger, Tex. Nichols reported from Indianapolis. Ungar reported from Ranger, Coal Mountain, W.Va., and Louisville.
The article is about Prince Rogers Nelson, a famous musician who passed away at age 57. The article mentions his contributions to music, his work on albums like "Purple Rain," his Purple Reign phenomenon, and his public image. The text also discusses his family, including his son Paisley, and his legacy in music. The article includes quotes from friends and colleagues about his impact and personality. There are also mentions of his family's reaction to his death, and the upcoming "Purple Rain" movie. The article ends with a tribute to Prince's influence on music and culture.
Some states and water utilities are balking at the Environmental Protection Agency’s call to post inventory information online about the number and locations of risky lead pipes in their systems, according to a review of documents obtained from 49 states by the USA TODAY NETWORK.

Drinking water regulators in about a dozen states expressed varying degrees of resistance or concerns about the EPA’s directive encouraging water systems to voluntarily give consumers easy access to what utilities know about homes receiving drinking water through lead service lines, a key indicator of whether a home’s tap water could be contaminated and whether utilities are complying with testing regulations.

“We do not have the initial materials inventory from systems readily available and do not intend to spend valuable staff resources sifting through microfilm to find this information,” South Dakota’s water regulatory agency told the EPA, saying in its March 7 letter that it would instead post details about the subset of homes where each utility takes its water samples.

USA TODAY NETWORK reporters collected letters from 49 state agencies responding to the EPA’s call for action.
will be widely available online anytime soon.

“What the EPA is asking for is critically important,” said Yanna Lambrinidou, a drinking water safety watchdog and affiliate faculty member at Virginia Tech. She called resistance expressed by some states “highly troubling” and an impediment to the public knowing whether utilities are testing water from the right customers’ taps, meaning those with the lead service lines that are most likely to have lead-contaminated water. States’ lead enforcement letters to EPA

Even after Flint, Mich., switched to corrosive river water that drew lead out of pipes at an alarming rate, the city’s water system passed its EPA-mandated water tests in part because the city wasn’t testing at homes with risky lead service lines, as required. On Wednesday, criminal charges were announced against two Michigan state water regulators and Flint’s supervisor of its lab and water quality.

Most contaminants can be filtered out at a water treatment plant. But lead usually gets into drinking water at the end of the system, as it passes through lead pipes coming onto individual properties and into homes.

That’s what makes thorough tracking and transparency about the location of lead service lines important. If utilities test water at homes that have little or no lead in their plumbing, the results are unlikely to find contamination and can give a false sense of safety across the system, as they did in Flint, Lambrinidou said.

“Accountability, up until today, has almost been completely absent because the public has been left out of the equation of protecting ourselves from lead in water,” Lambrinidou said.

Beyond Flint: Excessive lead levels found in almost 2,000 water systems across all 50 states

A USA TODAY NETWORK investigation last month revealed that almost 2,000 water systems serving 6 million people nationwide have failed to meet the EPA’s standards for lead in drinking water. But people in thousands more communities deemed in compliance with EPA’s lead rules have no assurance their drinking water is safe because of the limited and inconsistent ways water is being tested, the investigation found.

It’s an issue with significant consequences because there is no safe level of lead exposure. Even at low levels, lead can cause reduced IQs, attention disorders and other problem behaviors in children. In adults, lead exposure is associated with kidney problems, high blood pressure and increased risks of cardiovascular deaths.

Federal regulations required water systems in the early 1990s to determine what kinds of materials their pipes were made of in at least some portions of their distribution areas.

The EPA, as part of its effort to restore public confidence in the safety of U.S. drinking water, sent letters Feb. 29 to every state, calling on their drinking water regulator to “work with” utilities to post on the web those documents — as well as any updates or maps of lead service line locations.

Many states told the EPA that water systems were never required to file their
inventories with state regulatory agencies, which enforce federal drinking water regulations. The utilities merely had to certify that they had done the survey work in order to identify a limited pool of high-risk homes with lead service lines and lead plumbing to serve as tap water testing locations.

The very largest water systems only needed to identify 100 sampling locations, and federal regulations allow smaller systems to test at even fewer sites. Got lead in your water? It’s not easy to find out. Water regulators at the Virginia Department of Health told EPA that representatives from its state’s water utilities have “expressed a number of concerns … primarily about the expenditure of a substantial amount of staff and financial resources to complete this request,” according to the state’s March 25 letter. North Carolina and North Dakota also expressed concerns that gathering and posting inventory records would require significant effort.

“The placement of voluminous information gathered from these materials evaluations, most of which were conducted more than 20 years ago, on either the water system’s website or on our agency’s website would be overwhelming.” North Carolina’s Department of Environmental Quality said in its letter.

Some states, like Kansas, Missouri and Pennsylvania, have raised privacy concerns about publicly posting the locations of lead pipes or addresses where utilities test water for lead. Other states, like Florida, sent letters to the EPA that didn’t specify whether they had encouraged water systems to post inventories online.

The EPA said it is reviewing states’ response letters. “EPA believes these actions are essential to restoring public confidence in the safety of our drinking water,” the agency said in a statement. The information the EPA wants posted will help “demonstrate that (water utilities) have conducted a thorough materials evaluation and understand the locations of lead service lines in their system.”

Rather than call for water utilities to post inventories and any updated maps online, some state regulators have told the EPA they are asking for different types of information to shed light on lead pipes in the systems.

South Dakota regulators already have created and posted online reports for each water system listing the locations of water sample sites and whether they are served with a lead service line or other lead materials. “We included the address so that people could look at the table and see if their home was near one of these sites,” giving clues about their own home’s pipes, said Mark Mayer, the state’s drinking water program administrator. “We felt that that was as good or better than what the EPA was asking for.”

EPA delay in releasing danger level for lead in water raises questions

Indiana regulators are surveying their state’s water systems, asking for each to provide a tally of their lead lines. But the survey forms don’t give any location information. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s April 6 letter doesn’t say whether it plans to ask utilities to post inventory details, locations or any maps of lead line locations. The department didn’t respond to USA TODAY’s questions about this.

North Carolina, which balked at posting 20-year-old inventories online, said it instead will ask water systems to update certain forms, including those covering construction materials, plans for selecting water sample test sites and spreadsheets of test locations. But rather than post the information online, the forms will be “placed in our files, and will be available for public review, upon request,” the state’s letter said.

Jessica Godreau, chief of North Carolina’s Public Water Supply Section, told USA TODAY her department lacks the resources to scan massive amounts of information and post it on the Internet. But she said the updated forms, which the state expects to receive by sometime this summer, would be easily available to anybody who asks.

While many states told the EPA they’ll encourage water systems to post their original inventories and some said they are asking...
for updates, only a few states set deadlines or indicated efforts mandating sharing the inventories with the public, the USA TODAY NETWORK review found.

• Mississippi: Starting June 1, the state will require water systems annually submit an inventory or map of lead service lines and lead plumbing in their systems. The information will be posted on the state’s website.

• Illinois: The state told federal officials it will require water systems to update and refine their inventories of lead service lines. Although not specified the state's letter, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency spokesperson Kim Biggs told USA TODAY the information will be required to be posted on the Web.

• Ohio: Governor John Kasich and state water regulators recently proposed state legislation to require all water systems to identify and map areas of their distribution systems that “are known or are likely to contain lead services lines.” Systems “will be required to submit a copy of the map to the Ohio EPA and we will work with water systems to ensure this information is posted on state and local websites,” Ohio's letter said.

• Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada and Utah: These states said they are asking their water systems to update their inventories. Kansas, noting possible “homeowner privacy concerns,” said: “Posting of that updated information will also be left to the discretion of the water systems.”

Despite such concerns, some municipal water systems already are posting detailed maps online showing the locations of lead service lines. Massachusetts regulators, in their March 29 letter, noted that the Boston Water and Sewer Commission’s online inventory information could serve as a model for others. The City of Cincinnati has posted similar information online that allows customers to look up information about whether they have a lead line, the Ohio EPA said in its April 1 letter.

Boston’s water system has been posting maps of lead service lines since 2006. The system used a water meter replacement program during 2002-2004 as an opportunity to also catalog what individual water service lines were made of, said James Steinkrauss, the commission’s deputy general counsel. While the system sent letters to customers in 2005 notifying them if they had a lead service line, Steinkrauss said the public maps allow renters and others to know if a property is known to be served by a lead pipe.

Lead taints drinking water in hundreds of schools, day cares across USA

The maps list addresses but not any customer names or other account-specific information, he said. “We haven’t had a lot of negative feedback.” As a government agency, the commission’s documents are subject to public disclosure. “We have a certain level of comfort we can make public records available to the public,” he said.

How far the EPA’s suggested and voluntary encouragement will go remains unclear. Officials at some major water companies told USA TODAY that while they are in favor of transparency, they worry about balancing customer privacy with public disclosures.

“While we respect and understand the intended benefit of making materials inventories and locations of lead service lines public via our website, we are equally and concerned about the negative impacts this could have,” Aqua America, which provides water and wastewater services to about 3 million people in eight states, said in a statement to USA TODAY.

Those issues include “inappropriate use of this information by third parties” and making customers hesitant to participate in sampling programs because of privacy concerns. “We believe we can achieve the same results by directly and privately notifying customers who have lead service lines,” Aqua America said.

Officials at American Water, which provides water and wastewater services to about 15 million people in 47 states and Ontario, Canada, said many water systems don’t have detailed, accessible inventories of customer connection pipes. Much of that information is on about 3 million, decades-old, 3-by-5 paper index cards – one for each drinking water connection, said Mark LeChevallier, the company’s director of Innovation and Environmental Stewardship.
American Water has been in the process of digitizing and geocoding the information. LeChevallier expects the work to be done at all of its systems in about six months. But each card has varying amounts of information about whether a line is made of lead, he said, and some have no information about the line’s materials.

While the digitizing project will make it easier for American Water customers to get information about their own service lines, the company is concerned about customer privacy implications of publicly releasing maps or locations of lead lines.

“We would like to have a discussion with the state agencies and EPA around the issues of how do we actually present this information to the public,” LeChevallier said.
See whether your water system failed EPA lead testing

Since 2012, nearly 2,000 water systems across the U.S. have found elevated lead levels in tap water samples, a public health concern that requires them to notify customers and take action. Search or click the map to find systems in your area. The map table shows the state name of the water system; the county it serves; the range of lead levels over 15 parts per billion in samples that triggered an action status; and total action-level tests over the period.

March 16, 2016
Lead in Your Drinking Water

Online video

Lead in your water | A USA TODAY Network Investigation

Across the country almost two thousand drinking water systems have failed lead testing since 2012. A USA TODAY Network investigation found harmful levels of lead in homes, schools, and other public buildings.

Month, 16, 2016
Our view

In dozens of little Flints, the water might be toxic

During the presidential campaign, one of Donald Trump’s most effective attacks was that he would stop the “people in Mexico who are coming over the border” from contaminating the water in Mexican cities with their toxic sewage. The president-elect’s administration has said it would refuse to do anything about pollution in Mexico, instead suggesting that people in Canada should take their pollution overseas. The United States is not the only country where pollution is a problem. Thousands of people have been exposed to polluted water around the United States, and many communities are struggling to keep their water safe. The problem of contaminated water in little Flints, like Otero County, New Mexico, needs to be addressed immediately. It is a crisis that cannot be ignored.

Opposing view

We have a plan to reduce lead now

President-elect Trump and the Flint water plan on tap

At the U.S. Mexico border during the Opening of the Door of Hope in San Ysidro, Calif., on Nov. 10.

Administration comes to the fore: At-long-last, the time has come for the Trump administration to take action on lead contamination in drinking water. This is not a new problem, and it is not going away anytime soon. The administration has had enough time to take action, and it is now time to do so. This is a problem that we need to address urgently.

President-elect Trump has proposed a $100 billion infrastructure plan that includes funding for water cleanup. This is a good step, but it is not enough. The administration needs to do more to address the lead contamination problem.

FILL BACKLY

Crime and justice

The administration should be doing more to address lead contamination in drinking water. The United States has some of the highest levels of lead contamination in the world, and it is time for the administration to take action. The administration needs to do more to address this problem.

F. H. Buckley

When President-elect Donald Trump proposed a $100 billion infrastructure plan that includes funding for water cleanup, he did so with the goal of addressing the lead contamination problem. The administration needs to do more to address this problem. The United States has some of the highest levels of lead contamination in the world, and it is time for the administration to take action. The administration needs to do more to address this problem.

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**TODAY’S DEBATE LEAD CONTAMINATION**

**Our view**

**Dozens of little Flints**

The Editorial Board, USA TODAY

During the presidential campaign, one of Donald Trump’s most effective lines was, “It used to be, cars were made in Flint and you couldn’t drink the water in Mexico. Now, the cars are made in Mexico and you can’t drink the water in Flint.”

Turns out, it’s not just Flint where drinking the water may be hazardous to your health.

A USA TODAY Network investigation, published this month, found that nearly 4 million Americans are drinking water that regulators have allowed to be either so negligently tested for lead that officials have no idea what is in the water or, when tests were done, high lead levels were ignored, often for years.

Dozens of lead-contaminated little Flints could be scattered across the country in communities of a few hundred to a few thousand people served by tiny water utilities with few resources and scant government oversight.

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But Trump’s professed concern for clean water and clean air may point to an opportunity for progress where eight years of a Democratic administration has left millions of Americans behind, many of them in poor and rural areas with water systems that could be tainted with toxic levels of lead.

The new president would be smart to look for opportunities to show his “forgotten” voters that he won’t forget them, even when it might mean more aggressive environmental oversight.

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Our view

In getting lead out of drinking water, where was the EPA?

When local and state governments led the public in removing lead pipe lines, a federal government body in Washington, D.C., failed to chart a course and standardize the process.

For more than two decades, the Environmental Protection Agency has been silent as the United States has been faced with an alarming lead contamination problem that is poisoning the drinking water of millions across the country. Although the EPA has been responsible for enacting and enforcing federal rules and regulations on environmental issues, it has failed to take action to protect public health and the environment. In fact, the EPA is one of the organizations that is responsible for the problem of lead contamination in drinking water. The EPA has the power to issue guidelines and enforce laws, but it has not taken the necessary steps to ensure that lead is removed from drinking water. Instead, the EPA has been slow to respond to the problem and has allowed states and local governments to take the lead in addressing the issue. This has resulted in inconsistent and inadequate regulations that have not been effective in protecting public health. The EPA has a responsibility to act and to provide guidance and regulations to states and local governments to ensure that lead is removed from drinking water and that public health is protected.
Our view
Getting lead out of drinking water

The Editorial Board, USA TODAY

When local and state governments fail their residents on a serious health issue, a tough federal watchdog can sure come in handy. Too bad the Environmental Protection Agency was so mired in legal protocol last year that it failed to come to the rescue of residents in Flint, Mich., where staggering levels of lead in drinking water became a national scandal.

Now, while Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy continue to play a high-level game of pass the blame, it's clear that every level of government failed Flint. The state's failures — bungling water treatment, then ignoring mounting evidence of tainted water — must be dealt with in Michigan. But the EPA's failures — to ensure compliance with federal law and warn residents of tainted water when the state did not — are a problem for the nation, considering that Flint is just the tip of a lead-contaminated iceberg.

A USA TODAY NETWORK investigation last month found excessive lead levels in nearly 2,000 water systems that serve 6 million people across the country. About 350 provide drinking water to schools and day care centers, where some of the highest lead levels were found. A water sample at a Pennsylvania preschool was 14 times the EPA's “action level” limit of 15 parts per billion. At an elementary school in Ithaca, NY., one sample tested at 5,000 ppb of lead, the EPA's threshold for hazardous waste.

When drinking water is tainted with lead, it is children who are at greatest risk from elevated lead levels in their blood. Certain amounts can cause everything from decreased IQ and behavioral problems to slower growth and a wide array of physical ailments. The damage might not show up for years, and there's no way to reverse some of the effects.

As in Flint, lead problems are often exacerbated by a problem of silence: In about 9% of the 2,000 cases, water systems failed to notify residents, as required by federal rules. In Sebring, Ohio, for example, excessive lead levels were found last summer, but local officials didn’t alert the public until January, after Flint made national news. While federal law gives states primary responsibility
to enforce lead standards, the EPA shouldn’t remain silent when a state fails to act — the excuse the agency used for failing to speak out about Flint. People can do a lot to protect themselves — using filters or drinking bottled water — but not if no one tells them there’s a problem.

The EPA has known for years about this failure to communicate. When drinking water in Washington, D.C., was contaminated with lead in the early 2000s, the local water authority repeatedly assured customers it was safe. When the authority — which was under the EPA’s direct supervision — was forced to come clean, it sent out vague language in a brochure approved by the EPA. As the disaster unfolded, a city council member demanded, “Where were you, EPA?”

Also missing from what should be a coordinated national strategy to deal with lead is a defined health-hazard standard — the amount of lead in water that makes it unsafe to drink or use for cooking. The 15 parts per billion level, if found in 10% of a system’s tested water, should trigger public notifications and improved anti-corrosion treatment at water plants. But in the 25 years since the lead rule was created, the federal government has yet to publish a recommendation for precisely what level of lead is hazardous to the most vulnerable consumers, such as infants drinking formula made with tap water. Without a health-hazard level, families do not know when they should switch to bottled water or use filters to make tap water safe.

Determining this level is no doubt difficult, in part because federal health officials say there is no safe level of lead in drinking water. The EPA has said that it hopes to announce a standard in 2017. It’s about time.

Ultimately, the only way to assure lead-free water is to replace the nation’s lead pipes, a project that would cost billions and take decades to complete. Michigan’s governor set an “intermediate-term goal” for Flint of planning and prioritizing the removal of lead service lines, the pipe that carries water from the main under the street onto your property and into your home.

Meanwhile, along with corrosion controls, there are ways to ensure that children are protected from lead-tainted water: A national, consumer-friendly database where people could check whether their home is served by a lead service line would give them the information to decide whether to filter their water.

Nothing utilities or governments do will make much difference, however, until local and state officials know that when they fail to perform, a federal watchdog will bark rather than roll over.

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