



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on April 11, 2016

The Flint Water Crisis: Coming to a City Near You?

After nearly two years of dealing with lead-contaminated tap water, residents of Flint, Michigan, can drink it once again, provided they use proper filters. It's even safe to bathe in unfiltered water.

So says a committee of state, federal and independent water quality experts who released test results on Friday. The [Flint Water Interagency Coordinating Committee \(FWICC\)](#) also emphasized that the city is working diligently on improving its water pipes to prevent further contamination.



Despite the optimistic outlook, the news comes with some important caveats. Speaking for the committee, EPA acting regional administrator Robert Kaplan expressed reservations. Orthophosphate added to the water supply is beginning to restore a protective coating to the city's pipes, thereby dramatically reducing soluble lead. "What we're seeing though is particulate lead, which indicates that the system is unstable," Kaplan explained.

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This "particulate lead" shows up as tiny flakes scaled from damaged pipes. The FWICC recommends that residents use filters to catch the lead fragments, replacing cartridges often and only running cold water through them. And it still advises bottled water for vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and small children. Moreover, the water experts are also asking residents to flush their homes' water faucets regularly to remove pieces of lead that may be trapped in the plumbing.

But after two years of paying for unusable water that is ranked the most expensive in the nation, Flint taxpayers aren't excited about flushing even more drops — and dollars — down the drain. Washington D.C.-based public interest group Food & Water Watch [reports that the people](#) of Flint pay roughly \$864 per year for water service, which is nearly double the national average. And residential customers have yet to see the promised \$30 million in water credits approved by the State of Michigan in February to reimburse them for the contaminated water they've bought during the past two years.

Ironically, the trouble started after Flint switched its water supply in an effort to save money. In April 2014, the city began sourcing its water from the Flint River rather than Lake Huron and the Detroit River. Chemicals used to treat the water leached lead from the city's aging pipe system. Almost overnight citizens started complaining about foul taste, color, and odor in their drinking water. A string of investigations and lawsuits ensued, revealing gross mismanagement by local, state, and federal environmental officials who realized the extent of contamination but ignored and even covered up the crisis. Several officials have resigned, including the EPA's regional administrator Susan Hedman.

Yet the Flint "water crisis" is nothing new. Virginia Tech engineering professor Marc Edwards, an expert on municipal water quality and investigator with the FWICC, told the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in March, "I was not surprised when Flint occurred. I was expecting a Flint to occur."



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“EPA and other agencies caused a similar lead-and-water crisis in Washington, D.C. from 2001 to 2004,” Edwards explained. “They completely covered that up for six years and wrote falsified scientific reports. And it created a climate in which anything goes across the United States, anything at all to cover up health harm from lead in drinking water.”

Asked to compare the effects of the Michigan and Washington crises, [Edwards told InsideSources](#) that “the long-term health impact of lead-tainted water in the nation’s capital will be ‘20-30 times worse’ than what’s happened in Flint.” He said that more than six times as many people were exposed in D.C. for twice as long as in Michigan to lead three times the level measured in Flint.

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), lead is a known neurotoxin and especially dangerous to the developing brains of fetuses and children. Long-term health effects include behavioral disorders and decreases in IQ. But lead also affects all body systems in both children and adults, and can result in disorders such as anemia, digestive disease, brain damage, and epilepsy. Unfortunately, judging from the government’s track record of lead contamination mismanagement, the question is not if, but when and where will the next disaster strike?



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