water is life

Office of the General Manager

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY | 5000 OVERLOOK AVENUE, SW | WASHINGTON, DC 20032

March 11, 2016

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
Representative
U.S. House of Representatives
2136 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Norton:

This is in response to your February 22, 2016 letter requesting a status update regarding lead in the drinking water in the District of Columbia. DC Water remains strongly committed to working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Washington Aqueduct to minimize customer exposure to lead through drinking water in the District. Our efforts include conducting regulatory compliance monitoring for lead at the tap year round, monitoring lead in the water extracted from the Potomac River, offering free lead water testing to all customers, replacing lead service pipes, educating our customers on the health impacts of lead, and helping them identify and remove lead sources on their property. Customer safety is our top priority, and we consider lead in drinking water to be a serious health risk.

In the District, drinking water is essentially lead-free when it leaves the Washington Aqueduct's treatment plants. DC Water and the Washington Aqueduct have a strong working relationship that includes frequent information sharing regarding water quality. To prevent corrosion and the release of lead in pipes and fixtures, the Washington Aqueduct adds a food-grade chemical called orthophosphate to their treated drinking water. Lead can still enter drinking water that travels through a lead service pipe, lead solder or household plumbing containing lead. Common sources of lead in household plumbing are as follows:

- Lead service pipe: The pipe that connects the water main in the street to household plumbing. The portion of the pipe in public space is maintained by DC Water and the portion that is on private property is the property owners' responsibility.
- Lead solder: Filler material that connects pipes in home plumbing. Use of lead solder was prohibited in the District of Columbia after March 21, 1987.
- Brass faucets, valves or fittings: Prior to 2014, brass could contain up to eight percent lead.
- Galvanized iron pipes: A type of household plumbing that can be a source of lead in homes that have, or had, a lead service pipe.

DC Water complies with the EPA Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) and routinely collects water samples from household taps and tests these for lead. Customers can also request a lead test at any time. To comply with the LCR, DC Water collects samples from at least 100 single family homes every six months that have a partial or full lead service line. Although DC Water is eligible to perform reduced monitoring, we believe collecting samples throughout the year provides a comprehensive view of lead in the District of Columbia. The LCR requires DC Water to collect a first-draw sample, but DC Water also collects a second-draw sample, which is not required by the LCR. The second-draw sample provides DC Water and the resident with additional information on their water quality. To ensure the resident collects the samples in accordance with the LCR, DC Water provides sampling bottles and EPA-approved instructions. The LCR requires the water in the residence to remain stagnant (no water use) for a minimum of six hours before the sample is collected. DC Water does not require our customers to flush their taps before sample collection. After DC Water collects the sample bottles from the customer, the samples and Water Sampling Form are examined for compliance. Valid samples are then analyzed by the Washington Aqueduct Laboratory.

DC Water notifies each resident of their results within 10 days of receipt of the results and provides information on how to remove all sources of lead. After the monitoring period has ended, DC Water calculates the 90th percentile and submits the results to EPA Region 3 and the District Department of Energy and Environment. The EPA Lead Action Level requires at least 90 percent of the households tested for lead under the LCR must have first draw sample levels below 15 parts per billion. DC Water's 90th percentile lead level has been below the Lead Action Level since 2005. The observed lead levels have consistently declined since 2004 due to the corrosion control treatment (addition of orthophosphate) at the Washington Aqueduct treatment plants.

In addition, the Washington Aqueduct constructed several assemblies made of lead service lines that had been removed from the District's distribution system to mimic typical conditions found on properties with lead service lines. These "pipe loops" are sampled weekly and subjected to the same conditions required for LCR compliance. The Washington Aqueduct currently operates lead pipe loops at both the Dalecarlia and the McMillan water treatment plants to continually verify that the water entering the distribution system will not leach lead from lead service lines. As an added control, DC Water also constructed lead pipe loops at its Fort Reno pump station that are sampled twice weekly to simulate conditions found in the homes that we serve.

Lead levels vary among households, so DC Water encourages customers to identify and remove potential lead sources on their property. District residents can determine if they have a lead service line by calling our customer service department at (202) 354-3600. At any time, a property owner may opt to replace the portion of lead service pipe on private property and DC Water will simultaneously replace the portion of service line in public space. Moreover, DC Water removes public lead service lines as part of its water main replacement projects. Prior to construction on the main projects, DC Water engages customers to encourage them to coordinate the removal of their private lead service line at their expense. DC Water is prohibited by law from funding the replacement of lead service lines on private property. I have included a sample

of our public outreach materials on this topic for your reference. DC Water also maintains a comprehensive webpage focused on lead in drinking water at dcwater.com/lead. This page hosts the results of our LCR monitoring.

DC Water recognizes the financial burden of replacing private lead service lines, which ranges in the thousands of dollars. We are encouraged, and wholly support, recent proposals in Congress that would provide federal assistance for replacing both public and private lead service lines. While treatment has proven effective at reducing the presence of lead in water, the complete removal of all lead sources remains the fail-safe method to prevent lead poisoning.

We commend your continued leadership and interest in water quality issues impacting the District of Columbia and the nation. DC Water looks forward to working with you on these issues in the future. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

George S. Hawkins
CEO/General Manager

I would be glad to answer any further questions you may have. I am always grateful for your focus and visitors.

George