The Virgin Islands Consortium

Water Testing Finds Elevated Levels of Lead, Copper in St. Croix Samples

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The V.I. Water & Power Authority announced on Saturday that several water samples collected and tested during an exercise the day prior had shown elevated levels of lead and copper.

The authority said 35 of the 66 samples collected showed these concerning results. However, WAPA says that the issue may be related to stagnant water, as the presence of the detected heavy metals in "the vast majority" of cases, according to WAPA, was greatly reduced or eliminated after water lines were flushed and re-tested. However, even after the flushing, testing in Diamond, Castle Burke Community, Colquohoun and Mon Bijou still showed elevated levels of copper and lead.

WAPA says that further investigation is needed before final conclusions can be reached.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which is working together with WAPA, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the University of the Virgin Islands on the St. Croix water testing project, has committed to providing technical assistance in support of a comprehensive resampling effort, the WAPA announcement said.

Meanwhile, in addition to taking secondary samples, WAPA said it continues to flush water lines across the distribution system, concentrating on the four communities which are still showing elevated levels of copper and lead.

While the authority says that most of the community does not consume this water, WAPA has nevertheless issued the following recommendations:

- Run your water to flush out lead. The longer water sits in your home piping; the more lead may leach from lead-containing fixtures. Before drinking, flush your pipes for several minutes by running your tap, taking a shower, doing laundry or a load of dishes.
- Use cold water to cook and to prepare baby formula. Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap; lead dissolves more easily into hot water. Do not use water from the hot water tap to make baby formula. Remember, boiling water DOES NOT remove lead from water.
- Identify and replace plumbing fixtures that contain lead. Brass faucets, fittings, and valves, including those advertised as “lead-free,” may contribute lead to drinking water. The law currently allows pipes, fittings, and fixtures with up to 0.25 percent weighted average of lead to be identified as "lead-free. Plumbing materials that are lead free can also be identified by looking for lead free certification marks.
- Consider using a filter certified for lead removal after flushing your water. Read the package to be sure the filter is approved to reduce lead. Verify the claims of manufacturers by checking with independent certifying organizations that provide lists of treatment devices that they have certified.
- Regularly clean faucet aerators. Aerators, the screens at the end of faucets, can collect debris. Rinse out collected materials to reduce debris accumulation.
- Use an alternative source. Until the concentration of lead in drinking water is mitigated, you should use a different source of drinking water (i.e. bottled water).Periodically re-test your water for lead. Contact local labs such as Ocean Systems Laboratory at (340) 718-3246 located at 4049 La Grande Princesse, Christiansted, VI 00820 to do water testing.

WAPA notes that work continues to overhaul the entire water distribution system on St. Croix, as a longer-term fix to the problems of water discoloration and metal contamination.

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