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St. Croix's Lead Water Crisis Overblown as New EPA Tests Show Promising Results

Recent findings alleviate concerns over lead and copper levels in local water supply

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. delivered promising news from new water tests performed by the Environmental Protection Agency on St. Croix. The latest tests indicate that the widespread concerns over elevated levels of lead and copper in the water system might be unfounded.

This announcement comes as a relief following a period of uncertainty and proactive measures taken by the Bryan administration to address the potential water quality issues. And it follows [scathing criticism](#) by water experts who had rubbished the EPA's initial findings of extremely high levels of lead and copper in St. Croix water system.

“The data should be thrown into the garbage,” Virginia Tech water expert Marc Edwards, who helped identify the water problems in Flint, Michigan, told the Associated Press on Wednesday. Mr. Edwards expressed skepticism about the exceedingly high results, attributing the discrepancy to the method of sample collection. Typically, lead testing involves taking water samples from a household faucet. However, the notably high readings on St. Croix were obtained from samples collected at the water meter, not from household faucets.

The EPA, in collaboration with the Water and Power Authority (WAPA) and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), conducted extensive followup testing in early November. The results, shared with the Bryan administration on Wednesday, revealed that lead and copper levels at all tested sites were significantly below actionable levels, with many areas showing non-detectable traces.

These findings provide a new perspective on the initial elevated readings of lead and copper, which are now understood to be largely due to deviations from standard testing protocols. The administration, like the water experts interviewed by the AP, said the EPA's initial protocol involved sampling at the meter rather than the tap, potentially introducing contaminants into the sampled water.

Governor Bryan had taken several protective actions following the initial water tests, including issuing a no-drink advisory, declaring a local state of emergency, and requesting federal emergency support from President Joe Biden. These measures included lead exposure testing for children and distributing drinking water vouchers to affected residents.

In today's announcement, Mr. Bryan said. “The well-being of our community is paramount. While these results are encouraging, our work continues.” The administration said it is committed to refining testing protocols and ensuring accurate water quality assessments, in collaboration with FEMA and other federal partners.

Despite the latest developments, the need to replace St. Croix's water system remains a consensus among all stakeholders. The long-standing brown water crisis, highlighted by residents' testimonies at a Senate Committee hearing, underscores the urgency of infrastructure upgrades.

Maria Friday, a resident, expressed the community's anxiety, saying, “Every time they turn on the tap, they are faced with potential harm.” In response, recent grants from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and funds from the Clean Water Act have been earmarked for addressing these infrastructure issues.