

GRATIOT COUNTY

St. Louis tap water testing underway

Switch to new water source motivates lead testing amid Flint water crisis

By **Lisa Yanick-Jonaitis**

ljonaitis@michigannewspapers.com
@lisayj_msun on Twitter

A sample group of property owners in St. Louis will begin testing tap water quality soon af-

ter the city sent letters asking for participation late last week.

Although St. Louis would normally not be required to conduct the lead and copper sample testing until 2017 after tests in 2014 showed 90 percent sample be-

low the Environmental Protection Agency's "action level," the switch to a new water source late last year motivated the early test, which will double the sample size from 20 to 40 properties.

Those 40 properties include the 20 tested last time, plus 20 more from past testing samples, as long as the properties still meet requirements, which include being high risk for testing positive

for lead and copper because of the age of the building.

If for example, a building has had construction work since last tested that includes new plumbing, it likely would no longer qualify to be a sample site, because the system would not have lead components like those installed before the mid-1980s, said city manager Kurt Giles.

Once a property owner receives

a letter asking to participate in the sample, they are asked to call the city so a determination can be made about the eligibility of the home for the test. If they're eligible, they're given a testing container and an instruction sheet; the actual collection is done by the property owner themselves.

Instructions include allowing water to sit idle in pipes for at

WATER » PAGE 2

Water

FROM PAGE 1

at least six hours before collection, gathering water from a commonly used faucet and recording information about the sample like date and time taken for the analysts. Once a sample is collected, city employees pick it up and send it to a lab; Giles said in 2014 testing was complete within a few days. The city then mails lab results to each property owner within 30 days of receiving them from the lab.

In 2014, 45 percent or nine of 20 of the sampled homes had trace or no lead levels. Two of the properties -one a home and the other a business or other property- tested at above the 15 parts per billion the EPA considers actionable for lead. The rest fell in between.

Because the city's sample was at exactly ten percent actionable and not higher, no further action was needed; source water for St. Louis at the time did not show elevated lead levels, leading to the conclusion that those two properties had corrosive action in pipes that contained lead components, similar to the lead water crisis in Flint.

Both properties participated in the lead and copper testing in 2008 and again in 2011 before the 2014 results.

In 2014, 45 percent or nine of 20 of the sampled homes had trace or no lead levels. Two of the properties -one a home and the other a business or other property- tested at above the 15 parts per billion the EPA considers actionable for lead. The rest fell in between.

Neither was above the 15 ppb action level for lead until 2014, when one tested at 55 ppb and the other at 73 ppb.

Giles said any properties in the latest test that show higher than action levels for either lead or copper will receive additional information, regardless of the whether or not the city is required to take any action overall based on the results.

"We really appreciate the cooperation of our customers in this testing," Giles said. "Lead and copper testing is a partnership between the city and the building owner."